

THE ARGOSY.

FEBRUARY, 1882.

MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE TEMPLE.

THE brightness of the long summer twilight was still lingering when Frank Raven alighted from his cab, under the trees of King's Bench Walk, in the Temple. He paid the driver, and then, guided by the names on the doorposts, and carrying his little valise in his own hand, he mounted to the topmost storey of one of the dingy mansions.

There he found a door bearing the name of Mr. Philip Connell. It stood half open, with a bundle of washing blocking it up, and Frank's rap met with no more ceremony than an invitation to "come in" from his cousin's own voice, while an elderly woman came forward and pushed the bundle aside, begging pardon for its appearance.

Frank advanced into the chamber. Philip Connell was seated, cigar in mouth, in a low lounging chair. There were coffee cups and scraps of toast among the newspapers and books on the table beside him. When he recognised his guest, he sprang up in astonishment.

"Frank, old boy, so glad to see you! But really I did not expect you till to-morrow, so you must excuse all shortcomings. It's a mercy Mrs. Biggs is here at this hour. Here! Mrs. Biggs!" he called in a loud voice, and it brought in the woman. "Will you kindly get a cup of tea and a cottage loaf; and get two nice mutton chops. At once, please. This is a visitor from a long journey."

Then he added, aside to Frank, as she moved away to obey his orders, "I always excuse any extra job to the old lady. It sweetens her temper, and I find does no harm to the viands."

Philip rattled away with his pleasant common-places. Presently, meeting little response, it struck him that his visitor was sad and

absent ; and remembering that new grave at Ravenstoke, the young barrister kindly turned his light tongue to a graver tune.

"You can't think how welcome you are, Frank," he said ; "all the more so that I did not hope my letter would meet with so prompt a response—even if it got a favourable answer at all. We were often talking about you when I was lately at home in Colburn, Frank. My mother thought it strange there should be sickness in our house and at Ravenscourt at the same time. And how are my aunt and Leonard ?"

"Quite well, thank you," Frank replied. "I had made up my mind to come to London before I got your invitation, Philip," he added with some effort.

"Indeed ?" said young Connell, his eyes widening. "To see me ?"

"I—I don't know," answered candid Frank.

Philip Connell got an inkling that something had gone wrong, and with a ready and intelligent sympathy, for which everybody might not have credited that random youth, he pressed matters no further then, but set himself zealously to the performance of his part as host, talking about anything and everything : last night's debate, the new novel, or he fresh play. Frank Raven listened and replied like a man in a dream. At length, tea over, the two lit their cigars, and drew their chairs to the window, set wide open in the sultry dusk.

Frank felt like an impostor. He could not bear that Philip should continue to regard him as the well-provided son of Ravenstoke when he had begun to feel himself but a vague adventurer. With flushing cheek, Frank sat leaning forward, chin in hand and elbow on knee, gazing at the moon. Philip leaned back ; stealing, from time to time, an observant glance at his cousin.

"Did you see my father's will in the paper, Phil ?" Frank asked in a low voice.

"Well, I did," said Philip. "I saw it one day when there was a press of news, so that it was very prettily curtailed."

"I daresay my name was not mentioned at all," Frank went on, with nervous resolution, "for I come in for nothing at all now."

"That I call a downright shame !" exclaimed Philip.

"Leonard has the estate, of course. And my mother has all the money for her life-time, and I am to come in afterwards."

"Well, well," said Philip, shaking out his meerschaum and refilling it, "that's a queer arrangement. But, of course, she'll do handsomely by you. She couldn't do less."

"Of course she would," Frank eagerly assented. "But I've made a fool of myself. I can't deny that it did seem rather hard, but my father had every right to do what he would with his own. Only I'd been brought up to like a life that one can't live upon nothing : and—and I don't know what I'm fit for. A fellow cannot get a living by sitting well in the saddle, or by being a crack cricketer—not if he's a gentleman !"

"What on earth are you talking about?" interrupted Philip. "How did you make a fool of yourself? As to its being rather hard, it is confoundedly hard. And I'd have said so, downright, myself"—and the young barrister smoked emphatically. "But as for your having to get a living, it must be mere stuff and nonsense!"

"It might have been better, if I had spoken out at once, too," said Frank, meekly. "Instead of that, I kept it rankling within me. And when Leonard began to speak of my future course—quite naturally and properly, and it was very kind of him—then I felt it as if he were giving me a stab; and I flew into a rage, and out came my bitterness. All at the wrong time, and under the wrong circumstances."

"And then?" prompted Philip, for Frank paused.

"And then the end of it is," said poor Frank, desperately, "I feel I must begin to depend on my own resources. And I don't know what they are! If I did, I should not mind anything else," he added, thinking of that lonely little governess, and the brave face she turned on her self-dependent life.

Long and long the cousins talked, drawn up side by side at the narrow window, within hearing of the hum of mighty London, and miles and miles away from quiet Ravenscourt, with the birds' nests in the old oaks standing round it.

When Philip had heard the whole history, he acknowledged that it was quite natural in Frank to have made that rash resolution, not to be obliged to them for money; he might have made it himself, but then he was sure he should have intended to keep it in the spirit rather than the letter. He felt certain that Mrs. Raven would never permit such a course: he knew what mothers were. Frank might make believe to take his own way, if he liked; he would have to give it up in the end, to save her from breaking her heart.

And then Frank felt that though he had striven hard to tell his story truly, yet something had escaped in the telling. And he was glad of it. The heart knows its own bitterness, and is well satisfied to hide it.

Philip kept up his argument. "Would Frank have held to his word, had he vowed to burn down Ravenscourt, church, vicarage, and village?"

"No," said Frank, turning upon him brightly. "It is to one's honour to repent of ways that must injure others. But when we think we see what is right to do, we have no right to draw back because we find how hard it is."

"Yours—what I gather of them—are fine ideas," said Philip Connell, thoughtfully. "The worst of it is, that it takes money to keep them up. They suited you at Ravenscourt, no doubt. But if you carry them into any profession, I don't know how you'll get on. If one has to make one's way in the world, one must walk through a little dirt, and never mind the splashes!"

"That isn't honour!" cried poor Frank.

"I suppose I have no right to know what honour is," said Mr. Connell, good-humouredly. "You county families hold the monopoly, while my genealogy goes no further than a grandfather who made his money in a cotton mill. (I only wish he had made a little more!) You know the female grafts don't count for much in a family tree, Frank, but I suppose it is some of my mother's blood in my veins, which makes me feel you are a good bit in the right. I would help you, my boy, if I could."

"I can't believe the world is all sham and humbug," said Frank warmly. "I can't believe there isn't anybody in it who sticks to his principles."

"There are some who do. But we barristers have to—upon my word, I think the best I can do for you, is to introduce you to my old friend Gertrude Agate," broke off Philip. "I can't see how she can help you, but she may. And now I'll just go and look at your bed-room, and see if Mrs. Biggs has made everything satisfactory. I know the Ravens go to bed early, but I hope I shan't disturb you if I sit up here a little longer. That is one of my bad London habits."

Philip Connell took his cousin to his chamber, and with one or two closings of open drawers and slight disposings of toilet knick-knacks, he left Frank to his repose; Frank quite innocent that his host himself had no better resting-place than a dark closet, furnished with an old ottoman, a blanket, and a railway rug. Philip had intended to fit it up slightly as a temporary dormitory for himself, should his cousin accept his invitation. Perhaps a hope had floated through Philip's mind hazily that he might recruit his own shattered finances by some modest loan from the young cousin of better fortune. He was very poor; but he did not despond more than he had desponded yesterday; no, nor so much. He was one of those queer people whose spirits rise as their fortunes sink, who are quite convinced that when one door shuts, another opens, and who find a pleasurable excitement in wondering what it will be. It is a cheery nature which makes hardship and anxiety into a kind of cheerful game of chance—lose to-day, win to-morrow.

Without one grudging remembrance of the hours he had lost with Frank, Philip Connell sat down, a wet towel round his head, to write a review of a book he had not read, but which must be well praised in next day's *Evening Coach*.

Frank Raven slept heavily, but woke early, roused by his cousin rising from his finished midnight task, and wearily creeping away to the closet and the ottoman. The London daylight came grey and sluggish through the dingy brown curtains. How bright and fresh the light would break over the birds' nests in the oaks by Ravenscourt! "O father, father, why did you go away, and make it all so hard? O mother, mother, if your boy could only feel in his heart of hearts that you yearn towards him, as you wake in your lonely bed!"

An old judge's faded portrait looked down from the wall, and held its peace. Hot tears might fall on the clean pillows. If they did, who should know?

In the morning, when Frank opened his portmanteau, he lifted out the newspaper which Charity Hale had spread over his clothes, and something in it caught his eye. It was only a line printed in capital letters, at the top of that column wherein New Forest farmers announced their withdrawal from responsibility for their wives' debts, or New Forest lovers telegraphed to each other in very simple cipher. But this line only set forth a date—

"THE 4TH OF SEPTEMBER, 1835."

It was the date of Frank's own birthday.

"I wonder what that means?" he pondered. "It was the time when one unlucky fellow came into the world. I hope it means better fortune of some sort for somebody. Anyway, it can't concern me."

CHAPTER VI.

THE FRONT PARLOUR AND THE BACK.

FRANK RAVEN had to get through his first day in London as best he might. Philip Connell had to be out, and could do no more for his cousin than make him free of his books and his cigar case. He began to wonder whom Philip meant to take him to see. He had heard nothing beyond her name—Gertrude Agate. Philip had not recurred to the subject: probably he had forgotten his own suggestion.

Mr. Connell came in, breathlessly apologising for having been detained so long, and they got through their dinner.

"Come along now, Frank!" said Philip, "we will go off and see Miss Agate. I hope you won't be frightened at her. Not that she is at all frightful, only she is a very different style of person, and surrounded by a very different order of things, from what you have been accustomed to. I shan't tell you anything beforehand. Life has not so many sensations that I can afford to miss the sight of your bewilderment."

They had a long walk. It ended in that purlieu of poor streets which lies between Oxford Street and the New Road. Some of these streets had had, in their day, no mean pretensions to gentility, but they were now poor, and full of struggles for bare existence. Still, it was streets such as these which had always captivated Frank's imagination during his brief London experiences in days gone by. The very faces he met in these places, swiftly passing by, had suggested to him endless possibilities of romance and tragedy. And

he had implicit faith in the cloaked foreigners who stalk in corners. Even when they were Frenchmen—the refugee republicans of those days—Frank was more sympathetic than might have been expected from his Conservative breeding. But the Tories who had led his politics were of the sound, old-fashioned sort, who can forgive a Frenchman anything except contentment with his country or himself.

They turned into one of the quieter streets, where the traces of decay and poverty were at least decorous. Philip paused before a door in no way differing from all the doors around. Its handle and knocker might be a little brighter, but its paint was as poor and worn, and there was the regulation display of bells on its post. Philip pulled the lowest of them.

The door was opened by a little faded woman servant, hardly of middle age, with a scared expression of face. It brightened into a pale smile when she recognised Mr. Connell.

"Ha, Davies," said that gentleman, cheerily. "How are you? And is Miss Agate at home and disengaged?"

Evidently his voice was already heard within, for from the parlour came words in a clear, ringing tone, inviting him to enter.

Philip advanced with all his graceful self-possession. "I will not apologise for bringing my cousin to see you without express permission, Miss Agate," he said, "for you are the only person I know who can never be taken by surprise."

"Come in, certainly," answered the ringing voice. "My tea is just ready. And here are my cups and saucers."

"Miss Agate, allow me to introduce my cousin, Frank Raven, from Ravenstoke," said Philip, when they were fairly in the room.

A slight, upright figure rose to welcome them. That was all Frank could see at first, for the figure stood against the light, and it was already so late in the gloaming that the room was quite shadowy. Frank bowed, but the lady held out her hand.

"You are Mr. Connell's cousin," she said, "and therefore, I think we may shake hands. And will you sit down on that chair with the green cushion; and do you take milk and sugar in your tea? Mr. Connell takes only milk, and therefore I shall serve him first, or I shall be sure to forget his whims."

The words of the welcome might be homely, but there could be no mistake that she who uttered them was a lady, youngish yet. And when the faded little serving woman brought in a lamp, and Frank could clearly see his hostess's face, it did not belie her tone and manner. Frank was no connoisseur in female loveliness: only he knew the faces he liked. He had liked the face of that little lonely governess in the Ravenstoke lanes. And he liked this one.

It was a curiously straight face. The line of brow and chin was strictly even; all the angles of the countenance were right angles. Its contour was a little worn, and it was almost colourless; but the

complexion had a clearness and transparency which suggested perfect, if finely poised, health.

"And where is Miss Evelyn to-night?" asked Philip.

"She has gone to a little evening party," answered Miss Agate.

"I am glad of it. I often fear Evelyn finds her life dull."

"I can't believe in anybody being dull with you," said Philip.

"Can't you?" she replied, with a laughing shake of the head.

"You should hear Evelyn's side of that matter. Though she does not complain so much of me as of Mary Davies. And I do own Mary Davies *is* depressing. She would like to be always near Evelyn, shielding her from possible harm: when one has brought a child up, you see, one gets overfond of it."

"Which Evelyn naturally resents," observed Philip.

"Certainly," said Miss Agate. "But, as I say to Evelyn, why be cross with the poor, patient, faithful woman: as life goes on, one begins to find one is not troubled with too much love! Young people do not realise this. And Evelyn has been a little excited to-day. So have I, for that matter. And I daresay, if I tell you about it, you will laugh at us both for our pains."

"Then tell me, by all means," said Philip. "Never deny a laugh to a fellow creature."

"It is something I can show you," remarked Miss Agate. Turning to her desk, she lifted up a printed paper, carefully folded, and handed it to Philip, pointing with her finger to a special paragraph.

It was the advertisement sheet of a London newspaper issued that morning. Philip Connell read:

"The 4th of September, 1835. Apply to Messrs. Dewe and Creed, Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn."

"Why! that was in our Hampshire paper of yesterday!" interposed Frank, in his surprise. "At least, the date was: I don't think there was any address. I noticed it because it happened to be the date of my birth."

Miss Agate was looking intently at Philip Connell. "That is Evelyn's birthday, you know," she said, in a low voice.

"Is it?" said Philip, as if he did not feel pledged to remember every interesting fact about this girl. But he returned Miss Agate's gaze.

"And now your cousin says it was in the Hampshire paper, too," pleaded Miss Agate. "Don't you remember what I told you about the paper in the baby's pocket?"

Philip appeared to be thinking.

"Could I make some inquiry?" she resumed in an undertone.

"You ought not to do so," said Philip, quickly. "I might. But it may be like looking for a particular pebble on a shingly shore."

"I know that," she assented. "Yet it seems a chance. And I cannot bear to let one go by, for Evelyn's sake."

"She can never find a better friend than you, or a kinder home than this," spoke Philip emphatically.

"She might easily find a brighter and a richer one," returned Miss Agate in a gentle tone. "I think we ought to do something about this, Mr. Connell?"

"I could go to Dewe and Creed, and pump them," Philip answered. "Bless me," he went on, as she began to thank him, "it is all in my line. Legal investigation—experience of life, and all that, you know; and what is more, it is good fun."

Miss Agate did not seem inclined to dwell on the subject. She turned to her desk again, brought forward a magazine, and, apologising to Frank for introducing professional business, straightway began to discuss some subject of mutual interest with Philip.

Frank caught the names of divers newspapers and periodicals, and such phrases, strange to him, as "proof" and "copy." He was glad to sip his tea and glance round the room. There certainly was not such a pretty room in Ravenscourt. The walls were studded with pictures, many of them fine engravings or photographs from great masterpieces. Hanging shelves were there, draped with red and set out with china, and it never struck Frank's innocent masculine mind as at all out of the common, when he noticed that this decorative pottery was exactly similar to that in use on the tea-table. Each chair was different from the other; different as their occupants could be: for they were of ebony and cane, and oak, and red and grey chintz, and stiff mahogany and pleasantly faded tent stitch. There were books everywhere! Books in book-cases, books piled on little tables, books on sets of tiny shelves fitted up beside the fireplace.

Frank's attention was suddenly recalled to his hostess by her exclaiming, her clear voice full of passionate intensity—

"Oh, if I could only find somebody who really believes in goodness and truth!"

"What could they have been talking about?" wondered the startled Frank. "And who did not believe in truth and goodness? One might have lived through a whole generation at Ravenstoke, and never heard such a cry of yearning."

Philip laughed. It was not a mocking laugh. Perhaps there was a little pain in it. But he only said, in his usual bantering way—

"If you talk to yourself when nobody is here, Miss Agate, as you have been talking to me, it is a great and grievous waste. Never say a word for nothing, which you could get well paid for writing down."

"I don't believe that even our unspoken thoughts are wasted," returned Miss Agate, though she drew a long breath before she answered. "I was thinking when I spoke of God's marvellous goodness, His wonderful loving kindness to all His earthly flock; and I do not believe there is one of us—no, not one, Mr. Connell—who adequately realizes it, or can feel it as it deserves to be felt."

"Well, well," said Philip Connell, "we must each do the best we can, according to our lights, and though mine are dark enough, I might be better than I am, I freely admit. But I've brought you somebody after your own heart; somebody who is dreadfully in earnest, Miss Agate. This cousin of mine has made up his mind that it is his duty to make his own way in the world, and he is determined to do nothing but what he thinks is right. Where do you think that will end?"

"At the workhouse-door, possibly," said Miss Agate, quite cheerily, "but not probably. If you look in a beggar's face you will be generally able to remark, 'My friend, judging from your looks, I am thankful to see it is not your virtues which have brought you to this pass.'"

"And as a beginning," said Philip, disregarding the interpolation, "this young man has quarrelled with his own family, and I may say with his own bread-and-butter and jam."

"We have not quarrelled," put in Frank, stoutly. "But we shall do better apart just now. They feel they could not help me without really hindering me. At least, I feel that. I am sure it is true. It is quite right. It is best."

"I understand," said Miss Agate, kindly. But she said no more for a minute. And Frank's youthful pride took fire at the idea that some sort of silent appeal was made to her on his behalf.

"I shall do very well indeed," he said valiantly, with his heart sinking like lead within him. "A man can always help himself. Even his bodily strength counts for something. I can go to the backwoods and fell timber."

"Why need you go to the backwoods to do that?" asked the lady. "If you think your work lies in that line, why not do it here? A man can make his way as well in England as in the colonies, if he will do here what he would have to do there."

"But he can't," stammered Frank, "because"—he was going to add, "he would be ashamed," but before the words were uttered it seemed as if Miss Agate's eyes showed him the depth of their meanness and cowardice.

"Why not?" she asked, brightly. "A gentleman working among working men would be doing more towards the real progress of his race than a thousand elevating institutions. Remember, I say a gentleman. I don't mean a rich man whose bad habits have made him poor, and who degrades the honest class beneath him by taking refuge in it. Every year some poor man sets himself to grow rich because he appreciates luxury and power. Why should not gentlemen, who value simplicity and freedom from care, take up a workman's life?"

"But would it be doing the best we can with our talents?" asked Philip. "I thought you were always so strong on that point."

"Do men always go into professions to serve the professions? or because sometimes they think the professions may serve them?" asked Miss Agate.

"Oh dear," said Philip, ruefully, "now I'm in for it. Is the law any better for my services? Oh dear no. Am I very much better off for belonging to the law? Oh dear no. But I live in hope, which springs eternal in the human breast."

"If I were younger," said Frank, hardly knowing what to make of either of them, "I should like to be an engineer."

"Ah, yes; and that might have suited admirably," admitted Philip. "Suppose you advertise as one, and get somebody else to do the work?"

"I hate advertisements," remarked Miss Agate, "they minister to the prevailing sins of self-announcement and self-praise."

"Can't get on without advertisements," said Philip. "We all advertise in our own way. The eye of the public must be caught."

"Catch it, then, by saying that one sells tea," said Miss Agate, "but leave others to find out that it is the best and the cheapest of teas. You are better than your own words, Mr. Connell."

"No, I'm not," Philip answered. "I know I don't go to all the philanthropic dinners, and defend—free, gratis, for nothing—all belligerent missionaries' and charity-wardens. Young Rush does that, on my stair. But I don't abstain from principle, only because I can't be bothered. Don't think me better than I am!" he persisted, with half ludicrous pathos.

Miss Agate had not seemed to heed his later sentences. She had sat silently, and whenever she sat so, there came upon her face a curious, listening expression. Frank had noticed it more than once during the evening: he had even caught the infection, and listened too, and wondered what he expected to hear. The house was not profoundly quiet. Overhead, doors opened and shut, and voices were heard: but people do not listen for these ordinary sounds.

Frank had not sat long in that front parlour, before he had become aware that the back room, divided from it by folding doors, had an occupant of its own. He had heard a foot move to and fro—a heavy, slow foot, softly shod; a chair was drawn, and then came a sound, as if a large volume was suddenly closed. It was the last of these sounds which brought that listening expression to Gertrude Agate's face. Just as Philip finished speaking, there was again a sound of a closing book, and then a musically toned bell gave a tiny tinkle.

Miss Agate rose to her feet. Her guests rose, too; they were evidently dismissed.

She held out her hand to Frank, and her kind, eager eyes were fixed on him as she said:

"Do not fear life. Fear nothing but to do wrong. Never mind seeming to fail; when bubbles burst, they fall like dew. To do our best keeps us always busy; and then we can't be unhappy very long."

"We will come again, very soon, Miss Agate: as soon as I've seen these lawyers," said Philip. "And I'll bring Frank Raven with me."

The bell tinkled again. Miss Agate was already fingering a key

which hung from her girdle. And then Frank noticed that across the folding doors leading to that back room was swung a bar with a lock in it. Nobody could enter that apartment hastily or unawares.

"Poor lady!" began Philip, when they were once more in the street, "there's a terrible story in that back room. She has never related it to me; I've gathered it up here and there. I'll not tell you about it—at any rate, not now. She can tell it to you herself if she wishes you to know: and I shouldn't be surprised if she does tell you, for I know Gertrude Agate, and if ever she took to a new face, she took to yours. She's a genius and a good woman, Frank—just a little cracked, perhaps—but through a crack, my boy, we may see a star, which does not shine in at the front door."

"I scarcely thought her cracked," said simple Frank. "All she said seemed so reasonable that I felt as if I ought to think with her. Only I fancy I had never thought at all about most of the subjects."

"Maybe she is extra wise," answered Philip; with a queer laugh. "But that comes to the same thing. Cracked china and crackle china look very much alike, only the one is but too common, and the other is invaluable!"

CHAPTER VII.

GREEK MEETS GREEK.

"I suppose I must go to these men, Dewe and Creed," remarked Philip Connell, as he sat lazily sipping his coffee next morning.

"You mean about the mysterious advertisement," rejoined Frank.

"Yes. If the errand was not for Miss Agate, I should say it was a fool's mission; but she is the queerest woman I know for hitting on a right nail! I tell her she would have been burned in the witch days."

"What is the particular nail to be hit in the present case—if I may ask?" said Frank. "I did not understand it last night."

"It is the mystery of Evelyn," Philip answered, melodramatically.

Frank laughed. "I like mysteries. To begin with, who is Evelyn?"

"Evelyn is just Evelyn," said Philip. "She is very much just Evelyn and nothing else, though she is commonly called Evelyn Agate."

Frank looked puzzled. "Who is she, then?"

"That is what she does not know herself, and is particularly anxious to get explained," said Philip. "Neither do I know very much about her personally; except that she is what would be considered pretty by most people—including herself."

"Do explain, Philip!"

"Well, there is a mystery about the young lady's birth and parentage. I can never see how it can connect her with Miss Agate's own family tragedy: still I should think they are connected."

"The more you say, the more I am mystified, old fellow."

"You need not be," returned Philip. "You are quite welcome to know of Miss Evelyn what I know, Frank, and what she knows herself. She was left one evening at Miss Agate's door, without any clue to her identity."

"What a strange thing !"

"Hearing some prolonged noise outside, like a baby cooing, Miss Agate went to open the door, followed by her young servant—she was young then : twenty, or so—Mary Davies, who had also thought she heard sounds. There, on the doorstep, lay a pretty little girl-baby, a year old. Miss Agate took her in, and she and Mary brought her up between them—and I don't know which of the two women most loved the child. The name 'Evelyn' was marked in full with red marking-cotton on one of the little garments : nothing more. And that's all the history."

"Miss Agate seems to be a centre of romance."

"There's nothing like having a history of oneself to attract other histories," observed Philip. "All Gertrude Agate's friends have histories. You never find common-place people about her ——"

"But about Miss Evelyn and her history, Philip?" interposed Frank, keeping him to the point.

"Really and truly I have told you all I know of it, Frank. Perhaps our interview with these lawyers may tell us more. You can go with me there." And, this settled, they went out together.

To Frank, the office of Messrs. Dewe and Creed seemed quite an imposing place—a labyrinth of passages, with little rooms opening upon them, and busy clerks flying about.

"They do a great deal of agency work," Philip whispered to Frank, and Frank was as wise as before.

When Philip stated his mission of inquiry, a smart young clerk coolly observed that "this was some private matter : and they would have to wait to see one of the principals." He went away, and returned, and, with an air of much greater civility, invited them to take seats in a tiny sanctum, furnished with hard chairs and a high desk.

They were not detained long. A tall thin gentleman, with grizzled gray hair, and an acute but not unkindly face, presently came in and, announcing himself as Mr. Creed, said he was glad to see them, and ready to give them any information they required. Then he drew up a chair opposite, and sat down ; and straightway looked as communicative as the sphinx.

"Well," said Philip, with that easy nonchalance which was to Frank the very greatest wonder in wonderful London, "I will give you my card, as some sort of pledge of my *bonâ fides*. I would not send it in by the clerk."

Mr. Creed took it with a bow. "A barrister, I presume," he said.

"Yes," replied Philip, "though a briefless one."

The solicitor looked up. Nobody but a rising man would be so outspoken. "Not long to remain such," he said, graciously.

And then Mr. Creed looked at Mr. Philip Connell, and Mr. Philip Connell looked at Mr. Creed. Questions would have to be asked, and neither wished to ask the first, lest it might convey some information really more valuable than the answer to be received.

"Though I am a barrister," began Philip Connell, "you must view me in this matter only as a private gentleman; a clergyman, say, or a family doctor. In short, anybody with a trained discretion and a sense of honour might have been asked to do the duty I am now discharging."

The solicitor bowed. "I understand," he said.

"You had an advertisement in yesterday's papers," commenced Philip. That was a perfectly safe observation, while absolute silence was growing awkward.

"We had," said Mr. Creed, quite at his ease so far.

"Also in a Hampshire paper of the day before?" Philip remarked.

"We had," said Mr. Creed again; but with a perceptible guarding of face, which reminded Frank forcibly of the innocent hypocrisies of the childish game of "hide and seek."

"May I ask what is the significance of that advertisement?" inquired Philip, as airily as if he quite expected a frank answer.

"May I ask what reason you have for being interested therein?" returned Mr. Creed.

"I am entrusted to make this inquiry by a person who has reason to attach a very deep significance to the date mentioned in your advertisement," said Philip. "I presume that the date is the date of an occurrence."

Mr. Creed bowed. "Doubtless the date of many occurrences," he said with a smile.

At this moment the door of the room was opened, and shut again so quickly, that neither Philip nor Frank saw who it was that had looked in.

"But I presume," pursued Philip, "that you announce that date in hopes of eliciting a response from some one or other to whom it bears a special meaning."

"That is the natural inference," avowed Mr. Creed.

The door was opened again; this time by the dapper clerk. He announced that Mr. Dewe wished to speak with his partner for a moment.

Mr. Creed apologised and withdrew. He was absent fully five minutes: and when he came back he looked sharply at Frank. That is to say, he looked at him, for all Mr. Creed's looks were sharp.

"Am I asking too much if I inquire whether this date has any special significance in the county of Hampshire?" resumed Philip.

"Hampshire!" said Mr. Creed, rather tartly, "what makes you think of Hampshire?"

"Because your advertisement was put in a Hampshire paper."

"Oh," said Mr. Creed, quite sweetly. "Perhaps a Hampshire paper is the only country paper of that date you happen to know about."

"The date is so significant," said Philip, "that—my friend—thought it worth while to follow up the advertisement in the London papers, *before* knowing of that in the Hampshire paper. When known, it considerably strengthened the clue."

Mr. Creed bowed again. "Of course, you pardon my reserve," he said. "I have to study the interests of my clients."

"Certainly," assented Philip: "and, at the same time, I am zealous in the cause of my friend."

"This gentleman, I presume?" said Mr. Creed, with another bow in the direction of Frank.

"Oh dear no," Philip answered. The exclamation began with a genuine ring of disclaimer, but the final negative fell rather faintly. The young barrister had been off his guard for a second, but recovered himself immediately. Why need he deny so strenuously if the solicitor chose to take up a wrong scent? But Philip was reckoning without Frank.

"Oh no," struck in Frank, candidly. "It has nothing to do with me, except that it is the date of my own birth—which made me notice it in the newspaper I brought away with me when I left Ravenstoke yesterday. This is not my affair at all."

The lawyer bent forward, and was listening to Frank with encouraging interest. Philip gave a sudden tilt to his chair, which brought its leg sharply down on the floor, as if to put a full stop to Frank's communicativeness. A pause ensued.

"Do you think your friend would have any objection to give me a personal call?" asked the lawyer suavely.

"I should not like to advise it," said Philip, "unless you give me some solid ground to work upon."

"Well," said Mr. Creed, slowly, and toying between every word with a paper-knife, as if the revelation were a subject for painful consideration, "well—I think—I may say—this much: It is the case of—a missing child. The matter concerns—the happiness and well-being—of a wealthy and honourable family—and I can give no detail until I receive details which justify me in thinking we are moving in the right direction. Total disappointment and failure will be preferred to—to any mistake. If those to whom this date and this advertisement can possibly mean anything do not think it worth while to state their own case, I am instructed that my clients will not say the first word."

"Now we know where we are," cried Philip. "Well, as I can make my story clear to you without mentioning names—as, indeed, names are its great want—perhaps it is fair that I should be the frankest. Then, in my story, this date is ascribed to the birth of a certain person."

Mr. Creed gave a gesture of entire attention.

"It is almost all that is known of the birth," Philip went on. "The words, 'Born on the 4th September, 1835,' were written on a piece of paper and pinned to the clothes of a little child, who was left on a certain doorstep in the autumn of 1836."

"The child would then be a year old."

"Precisely so."

"And the child was—?" continued Mr. Creed, and paused with a note of interrogation.

"A pretty little girl," answered Philip.

"Taken to the workhouse, I suppose?" said the solicitor, looking towards the window.

"No," Philip replied, "she was taken in by the family on whose doorstep she was left."

The lawyer was now listening with unfeigned attention. "A very unusual act of charity," he observed. "Was there no clue whatever to the identity of this foundling girl?"

"None," said Philip, emphatically. "She was nicely dressed, and on one of the garments she wore was marked the Christian name Evelyn: nothing more. But in the child's frock there was a pocket, and in it were a few pieces of paper, which the little thing seemed to have played at tearing up, and which had probably not been noticed or remembered. Of course, they were pieced together, with the utterly unsatisfactory result of producing the word 'Hampshire,' and the solitary letter 'h.' The finding of the child was announced in the papers, but nothing came of that. You see a child is something you can't drop accidentally—so its loser is little likely to want to find it again."

"And in what class of life has the girl been reared?" asked Mr. Creed.

"She has received the education of a lady, and has lived under the supervision of one," replied Philip.

"And does she look one? Has she the marks of good breeding?"

"She has a graceful figure and small hands and feet," Philip answered cautiously. "She would be considered a pretty girl," he added, after a moment's pause.

"Well, well," said Mr. Creed, "so far there is a great deal which I think must be worthy of my client's attention; but I feel quite sure I must have a personal interview with the young lady. There may be one or two little points of family resemblance, and—and so on. Can she not come here, accompanied by some friend of her own? Let her appoint her own time—not earlier than the day after to-morrow."

"I daresay it could be arranged," said Philip.

"Then will you write to me, stating whether she will consent to an appointment—and, if so, when it is to be?" said Mr. Creed, rising, and thus intimating that the interview was at an end. "I am deeply

indebted to you for your frankness, and I am sure you must understand and respect my reserve," he continued. "You see your client can easily remain nameless, as long as she chooses. As regards her identity, I am no wiser now than when I first spoke to you." Philip nodded assent. "With my client it is different. The least disclosure might give a clue; which clue, if followed up, might lead to the disastrous and heartbreaking result of pretenders and impostures. If we lawyers always knew our business, Mr. Connell, we might do more work in our offices, and have fewer causes célèbres in our courts."

Mr. Creed saw them to the end of the passage. But as he turned to Mr. Dewe's private room his face was grave and thoughtful.

"I've taken your hint, Creed," said Dewe; "the advertisement is already off to other county papers. It would never do to give a clue to Hampshire. I wonder we did not see that before!"

"We are not used to this sort of work," observed Mr. Creed, rather grimly.

"Who could expect that youngster would be the first to walk into the office, asking questions!" retorted Dewe. "What a blessing he was pointed out to me at Ravenstoke, so that I knew him by sight! I recognised him the moment I opened the door of your room. And a good thing I looked into it when I did!—and had you called out to put you on your guard."

"I was on my guard before," growled Mr. Creed, who was not too well pleased with the business on hand.

"I say, Creed, that youngster evidently smells a rat!"

"Well," assented Mr. Creed, shaking his head, "it is hard to fancy he came here out of mere chance. And yet the barrister has told me a feasible story: and they are going, I believe, to send a girl to see me. But—as for that young Raven, he looked most entirely unconcerned, as if the business had nothing to do with him. Either he does not suspect anything at all, or he is the very best actor on or off any stage."

"Really I did think you two would never come to any understanding, Philip!" exclaimed Frank, as they walked away from the interview. "Why could not you tell your story straight off? What harm would have been in it? As the man says, he is no nearer knowing anything about Evelyn Agate now."

"One can never tell," said Philip. "Besides, he is a solicitor, and I am a barrister, and, unless I can bamboozle him a little, he would never trust me to bamboozle anybody else—never give me a brief. I don't believe I did it half well enough. My conscience is reproaching me that I was a great deal too soft. And who asked you to tell him about your birthday?"

"Why, it came out naturally," answered Frank. "That could not signify anyway."

"Well, then, don't burden the world with useless facts, and don't throw away useful ones," retorted Philip. "And now for home, that

I may write a letter to Gertrude Agate, and tell her all I have done in her cause, and that if she chooses to take Evelyn to see Mr. Creed, she can write to me and name her hour, and I will accompany her."

"It was very good of her to take in the poor little baby."

"Ah, there was an empty place awaiting it! And my firm belief is, that those who left it there knew that," added Philip.

"Is Miss Agate well off?" asked Frank, quite at sea among the new ways of life into which he was being introduced.

"Yes, and no," was the reply. "She has nothing but what she earns, but then she buys nothing but what she wants, does nothing but what she chooses, and consequently finds her expenditure considerably within her income."

"I suppose she works a great deal with her pen?" said Frank, with grave reverence.

"Yes," nodded Philip. "Yet she has much leisure. What she does comes easily off her pen, though I won't say it may have gone very easily into her heart. She uses a red ink, which is fearfully expensive, though it makes a clear and striking manuscript."

"Red ink! Expensive!"

"Yes. You may be wanting some yourself soon, Frank. For it is used for other purposes than writing. It is only life-blood."

Frank hardly understood. "Don't you mean to go and see her this evening—as you half promised?" said he, to change the subject.

"No. But she won't let the grass grow under her feet; we shall have an answer from her to-night, appointing a time to go to the lawyers'. You see I have literally nothing to tell her."

Philip was right. The two young men were once more smoking their evening cigars when the last post brought a letter from Miss Agate, in reply to Philip's hasty note.

"She's an aggravating woman!" he cried, as he tossed it to Frank. "Is it not too bad! I told her there was no need for these lawyers to know her name or address: even if she chose to write to them herself, instead of letting me. Just see what she says!"

"DEAR MR. CONNELL,—Many thanks for your great promptitude and for the kind offer of your escort. But why should we trouble you further? Evelyn and I will go to Portugal Street at noon on Saturday. I have written to Mr. Creed to say so. There is no necessity for any secrecy on our side, so I bade him address to me here, if our appointment was inconvenient to him. And I signed myself, as I do now,

"Yours faithfully,

"GERTRUDE AGATE."

"I think that is a very sensible and straightforward thing for Miss Agate to have done," cried Frank. "I can't understand beating about the bush for no object."

"Object!" echoed Philip. "Why, it is like playing at whist with a partner who sees no 'object' in not showing her cards! Besides,

Miss Agate ought to have seen a reason for not proclaiming her name! Look at the undue advantage it gives Creed! Of course, he will know everything at once!"

"What is there to know?"

Philip looked at the questioner. "Does the name of Agate suggest nothing to you, Frank?"

"Nothing at all. Except that it is a singular name."

"You are not much over twenty," returned Philip. "Of course, you did not read newspapers in your cradle. Any more than did I, for that matter. But since then my reading, as a lawyer, has lain among old cases, precedents, and so forth. So, I presume, has Mr. Creed's. Therefore, he will recognise the name of Agate; may go down to the Detective Department at Scotland Yard, and ask if the name is known there. I don't suppose the staff are entirely changed, even in the course of twenty years. Though, if so, they won't have allowed a standing reward of five hundred pounds to slip from their books—even in that time."

"Why, what are you talking of, Philip?"

"She is an aggravating woman!" was all Philip reiterated. "Her extraordinary frankness will only make Creed think there is some very cunning cheater about the whole affair. Never can I get her to understand that, if you honestly wish people to believe the truth, you generally have to tell them a lie. The world is taught on its very copybooks that 'appearances are deceitful.' When I am at my wit's end to get more credit, I always tell my tradesmen I'm very hard up. They think I'd never say so if it was true!"

"Well, all I can say is, that I am glad to have met Miss Agate; or I might think London morals as hazy as London streets."

And there rose up in Frank's mind a picture of the sweeping fields at Ravenstoke, with the pale light dying on the edge of the horizon, and the great trees closing up round the old hall, and the maid-servants stealing across the lawn to have a gossip in the village, while the footman drew the curtains of the drawing-room and shut in the lamplight. His mother would be sipping her tea; Leonard wandering about the room glancing at newspapers and dipping into books.

Frank could never have imagined that at that moment Leonard handed his mother a telegram, just delivered to him; and that she read it with half-blinded eyes and a reeling brain.

"From Messrs. Dewe and Creed, London, to Leonard Raven, Esq.—Two ladies are coming to our office at noon on Saturday in response to advertisement. Report promising. Telegraph instructions."

"Leonard, Leonard," said his mother, seizing both her son's hands and clinging to him, "I must go up to London."

"You will only compromise yourself in some way, mother," dissented Leonard. "Better wait and see what they find out."

"Tell them, the solicitors, to take care I don't compromise myself

—lawyers can always do that,” gasped Mrs. Raven. “But oh, Leonard, I cannot sit here waiting. It might be a saving of doubt and trouble if I were on the spot. I am not rash, Leonard. See! I am calm; quite calm.”

Her son looked at her doubtfully, and spoke unwillingly. “Well, mother, I suppose you must do as you will.”

And then Mrs. Raven went upstairs to her own chamber, and stood there in the dark, looking out at the moonbeams sleeping on the heavily laden branches—the same moonbeams that stole into Frank’s City bedroom.

If poor Frank had dreamed of such things in his troubled slumbers he would, on awaking, have only sighed, “How wild dreams are!”

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE LAWYERS’ OFFICE.

ON Friday night James Sloam, the page, took down orders that the little basket chaise was to be ready early next morning to drive Mrs. Raven to the railway station.

She came down stairs, muffled in her fur cloak and widow’s veil. Leonard did not rise to see her off. Little attentions had never been in his line: moreover, he did not altogether approve of the expedition. To take his breakfast frequently in bed was but a result of his sickly boyhood.

Mrs. Raven took her drive in silence. James Sloam, a good-humoured, country-looking lad, saw nothing significant in that. Mrs. Raven seldom spoke to her under-servants, unless to complain.

On the platform they found Charity Hale. She was to travel by the same train as Mrs. Raven, but only as far as the market town, Standchester. It was one of Charity Hale’s duties, though neither cook nor housekeeper, but simply the upper servant of all, to cater weekly for such commodities as the Home Farm did not furnish.

Mrs. Raven gave a start when she saw Charity, angrily wondering what brought her there, but the next minute recalled the fact that she was only where she ought to be, on that day and at that hour. Still, her presence brought uneasiness. From her carriage window Mrs. Raven watched her talking to James Sloam, before the train moved off. And at Standchester she watched again to see Charity alight from her third-class carriage: and when the woman was lost amidst the crowd on the platform she felt more at ease. Mrs. Raven was in that nervous and shaken condition when fear attaches itself quite unreasonably to everything. The train waited here ten minutes. It was about to start on again, when another passenger appeared in great haste, and was put in the carriage behind Mrs. Raven’s.

This was a tall woman, wearing the dark dress, mantle, and ample

veil which generally indicate a nursing sister or a member of some other benevolent association. Mrs. Raven wondered idly who she was—whether there had been illness anywhere in the neighbourhood, and this was somebody who had been engaged to tend the case, or whether she was some person connected with the new Vicar of Charl, who was reported to be so very High Church.

At the London terminus Mrs. Raven called a cab, and gave the driver the address of the office to which she was bound. She never noticed the tall woman, who moved unobtrusively among the hubbub. She also called a cab and gave her directions; and the cab followed that of Mrs. Raven.

Mrs. Raven found both the lawyers in attendance to receive her—this lady, whose case had been put before them by her son, with many hints and reservations which puzzled them exceedingly. So darkly, indeed, had her requirements been stated by Leonard, that much of Mr. Creed's cautiousness in his interview with Philip Connell was entirely assumed—his secret being that safest of all secrets, one unknown to himself.

As Philip suspected, the signature and address of Miss Agate's note had given the lawyers a certain clue to the past, which undoubtedly did not lessen their interest in the present case. They were genuinely attentive. Even solicitors are but men. These two had known family histories, and had mysteries laid plainly before them, which they could survey and grasp. But here they had a mystery that was still mysterious—a new chapter in an old story which had thrilled society more than twenty years ago—another act cropping up in that strange drama.

Mr. Creed, the older man, though his name stood last, disliked all business but conveyancing; yet, from the time of Miss Agate's note, he almost forgave Mr. Dewe for his tendency to dive into what he, in his older and steadier mind, generally called "dirty byways."

"You are very punctual, madam," the elder lawyer said to Mrs. Raven. "Probably the ladies who are coming will not keep us long waiting. Will you care to see the note we received from them? Then you will be in possession of all the facts we have ourselves."

The two partners had agreed that this letter should be shown. Mr. Creed watched Mrs. Raven as she read it. He thought her face grew a little paler. But he was not sure; it was so pale already.

"Do you remember the name of Agate?" he asked, very quietly. And there was no mistake that she started at the question.

"Yes—no. I—I think I have heard it before," she answered.

"Probably," said Mr. Creed. "So have we. So I think have most people who have lived to our age."

"I remembered it directly I saw it," interrupted the younger man, Dewe; "and we referred to an old newspaper to verify facts. It is almost impossible that both name and address can be mere coincidences. This Miss Agate must be of that same family."

The widow sat with open eyes and parted lips.

"Perhaps, madam, your memory does not serve you," observed Mr. Creed. "The facts were these: In the autumn of eighteen hundred and thirty-five a family of the name of Agate, living in the house whence this Miss Agate now writes, lost an infant child. It was kidnapped on the very day of its birth, presumably by the woman who had acted as nurse, since she disappeared at the same time, and could never be traced. Large rewards were offered for the child's recovery. All England rang with the story."

"I don't remember hearing of this at all," spoke Mrs. Raven, gathering what courage she could. "I do not read the papers much at any time, and I was ill at that date."

Before her mind rose up a vision of those far back days, when she had lain in the hushed state chamber at Raven, with Frank upon her arm. She could see the Squire steal in, on tiptoe. She could hear Charity's thin voice eagerly declaring that the dear lady had done justice to the old stock at last, and that the babe was no weakling this time, but a bonny boy. She could see herself, at hearing those words, turn upon her pillow, weeping bitter tears, and crushing and clutching the dainty sheets in her feeble hands. No! it was not likely she had read the newspapers.

"You may be sure that such an incident had terrible effects on the bereaved family," said Mr. Creed. "It was soon followed by a sad tragedy. But I need not go into that. It really had nothing to do with the boy who had been lost—or with the girl, either, who was found, almost exactly one year afterwards."

Mrs. Raven looked at him eagerly. "A girl was found!"

"Yes; left on the doorstep. She is coming here with Miss Agate to-day."

"Can I see these ladies when they come—without their knowing it? It is not desirable that they should see me."

"Certainly it is not," said Mr. Dewe. "We can arrange all that. You may see them through this little window. Pray observe that the clear stars on the ground glass give a command of the next room without revealing anybody who may happen to be on this side. It is really a very handy arrangement."

"Though I'm sure we never thought of such a use for it before," interposed his partner.

"Is there any special question you would like put to these people, madam?" resumed Mr. Dewe.

"Oh dear no," said Mrs. Raven, with a strange shrinking; and the observant solicitors thought she had seemed oddly timid and mistrustful since the mention of the Agates. "Yet I think I should like to ask about the mother of this boy, who, as you say, was kidnapped," she added, as an afterthought. "Yes, and about the nurse: she who was suspected of kidnapping him."

Mr. Creed assented, and made one or two notes.

"I wish I could hear the answers myself," observed Mrs. Raven, with a suppressed eagerness of manner. "I suppose that is quite impossible."

"I don't think so," said Mr. Dewe. "That starred window opens at the top, and if we draw it down a little, you will hear the voices well."

"And you might ask if the father of the missing boy is still living," continued Mrs. Raven, in the most common-place manner, though she thought her breath would never hold out during those few words.

"We can ask that, too," said Mr. Creed. "And now, madam, there is something else I must tell you. It may mean nothing at all. I only mention it because I do not choose to conceal aught from you, nor to penetrate into your confidence further than you desire. You remember I wrote you word that it was a gentleman who came here on behalf of this Miss Agate. He was accompanied by your second son, Mr. Frank Raven."

The widow's pale face turned perceptibly paler this time. Something like a spasm contracted her thin lips. Her voice shook as she spoke. "Who was the other gentleman?"

"A Mr. Philip Connell, a young barrister—a very clever young man, I should fancy," said the solicitor. "He came here as an old friend of Miss Agate's, empowered by her to make inquiries."

"Oh—that is my nephew—my husband's nephew," said Mrs. Raven; "Frank is staying with him. Was my son interested in this matter?"

"It is impossible to say," replied Mr. Creed. "The only remark he made during the interview was, that he had casually noticed our advertisement in the Hampshire paper because the date it named was that of his own birth. Mr. Dewe looked into the room accidentally, and recognised him from having seen him in the village when he waited on you at Ravenscourt."

"Did Frank see Mr. Dewe?" asked the widow, rather quickly.

"No," said Mr. Dewe, speaking for himself. "I am quite sure he did not. I do not suppose he has ever seen me."

"I am glad of that," observed Mrs. Raven, speaking with great deliberation. "It is not necessary that he should know anything of this affair. He is but young yet, and rather flighty, and if he knew anything he would have to know all, and it might make him look upon some things in an unwholesome light. My eldest son and I came to that conclusion."

"Of course we kept you and your instructions entirely out of sight," said Mr. Creed. "They ——"

He was interrupted. A clerk handed in a card to him.

"Here are the ladies," said the lawyer, in a lowered tone. "Now, Mrs. Raven, if anything arises during our interview on which you want further information, touch that hand-bell, and I will wait upon you."

Mrs. Raven took up her station at the window between the rooms, and watched the two strangers as they entered the other one. It did

not strike her she was doing a dishonourable thing. She was sinning on the line that she had sinned through her whole life ; and never, until that vein of sinfulness is nearing its end, do we detect its darkness. So little was she accustomed to regard her actions in relation to anybody but herself, that she did not even see the significance of Mr. Creed's words, as he took a chair opposite the Agates.

"I must ask you to remember," he began, speaking to Miss Agate, "that I am bound to report every word you say to my client. I mean that I wish you to understand that no statement you make to me can be regarded as in any way confidential."

"I comprehend," answered Gertrude Agate in her bell-like tones. "I am afraid we have only too little statement to make. I believe Mr. Connell has already told you the few and simple details of the finding of my adopted niece, this young lady, on my door-step, with the record pinned to her clothes : 'Born the 4th of September, 1835'?"

"He has done so," said Mr. Creed, with a polite bow and a glance in the direction of the young lady. "Still there remain a few questions which have occurred to me. And you must pardon me if these relate somewhat to your own family history. Your name," added the lawyer, "recalled to my mind the sad story of the little stolen babe who more than twenty years ago was taken from the very house whence you dated your note to me. I presume, therefore, that baby boy was some relation of yours."

"He is my nephew," said Gertrude Agate, quickly. In her mind she had always kept that child in the present tense.

"Naturally the story of the child which you lost, and of the child which you found, connect themselves in one's mind."

"Certainly," Gertrude Agate answered frankly, "I can never separate the two. I absolutely hope they are connected. It gives a double chance to the solution of the mystery."

As the lawyer turned over his papers he glanced again at the young lady, who, in spite of her elaborate braids and her aristocratic tournure, did not impress him nearly so much either with breed or possible beauty as did her little eager-eyed, dark-haired friend.

"Well, madam, I must ask—pardon me for it—whether your brother, the lost child's father, is still living?" inquired Mr. Creed.

"Yes," answered Gertrude Agate, with a checked sigh.

"I remember all the circumstances of the case," spoke the lawyer, quite sympathetically. "Everybody's pity went with him. May I inquire whether he is still in confinement?"

"He is at home with me," she answered with a sad simplicity.

"But he lives quite shut up," put in the younger lady, Evelyn Agate. "He has never even seen me."

"May I also ask what was the maiden name of the poor lady, his wife?" continued Mr. Creed.

"Marian Snow," shortly replied Miss Agate. "An orphan. Ah,

she was a sweet girl when my brother married her : good, gentle, lady-like, accomplished. I never thought he loved her half enough, and yet he loved her very truly, and was a good and tender husband—till the terrible end came.”

“I find the monthly nurse was suspected of the baby’s abduction,” Mr. Creed went on. “You see, Miss Agate, I have been refreshing my memory with the details from an ancient newspaper. Do you remember anything about this woman?—But you must have been very young at that time.”

“I was sixteen,” replied Gertrude Agate ; “I am eight-and-thirty now. I remember her perfectly. I am always quite sure it was she who took away the baby—only three hours after his birth. Every trace of her also vanished. My poor sister-in-law had hired her accidentally, and we could never find out where she had lived. I am certain I should know her if I saw her. I kept her image in my eyes and in my mind from that day, and have watched for her in the streets. She was a tall woman, with black eyes, and when she spoke she made long pauses between the sentences. I did not like her from the first, and her manner to me was rude and strange.”

“What was the baby like?” asked Mr. Creed.

Gertrude Agate shook her head. “He seemed to have brown eyes,” she said ; “but you cannot tell at that early age, and they may have turned out blue later. He was a bonnie bairn, and I would give all I have to find him now.”

“Well, it was very kind of you to take in the foundling girl in his stead, and I’m sure she has done you credit,” said Mr. Creed, inwardly adding, “Heaven forgive me for telling a fib.”

“Yes, it was very kind,” interrupted Evelyn Agate ; “but I may have lost something by the exchange, and that boy has got it ! Perhaps something that a girl could not inherit ? And that’s such a shame, for women want money more than men ! He could have been a doctor—or a lawyer—or anything. But I can be only ——”

“Only what ?” asked Mr. Creed, as she hesitated.

“A lady’s companion. It is what we have thought of—what I should like well enough.”

“And I’m sure you ought to find that position delightful.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” returned the young lady, whom Mr. Creed mentally recorded as “the young person.” “I want to see a somewhat different life, and I am looking out for an appointment : and I could not help hoping this might lead to some disclosure about me—and give her dear nephew back to Aunt Gertrude.”

“Well,” said Mr. Creed, rising, “I will write you a line, madam, as soon as I have seen my client. All that you have told me conveys nothing to me personally, but it shall be reported. Good morning.”

He hastened to Mrs. Raven. Her face was deadly white, and she had bitten her under-lip until it had turned a bright vermilion : and she had put on her gloves as if quite ready to depart.

"You never asked what had become of the stolen boy's mother," she began, almost accusingly.

"My dear madam," exclaimed Mr. Creed, "I knew that. That was the most awful end of the tragedy. Directly after that baby was stolen, the husband, Theodore Agate, who had been already overtasking himself with severe brain work, suddenly fell into a state of acute mania. In this terrible condition he rushed into the presence of his poor wife, and would have attacked her. That was prevented, but the shock killed her. The unhappy gentleman was confined for a while, and then he was given up to the care of his relatives. I could let you have an old newspaper with the whole story."

Mrs. Raven paced the little apartment.

"It is all no use," she said, "it will not do. I am frightened. It is not right that I should stir in this pursuit. Write to these people, please, and tell them your client has nothing to do with their matters: it was a mistake. Put a stop at once to anything more at present. Perhaps I may write again to you."

"It shall be exactly as you wish, madam," remarked Mr. Creed rather coldly, as he showed her out of the room and downstairs, placing the newspaper beside her in the cab.

She never even remembered to bid him a civil good morning. Therefore she was in no condition to observe that the nunlike woman she had noticed on the Standchester platform was now quietly seated in a confectioner's shop at the corner of the street.

"Well," said Mr. Creed to his partner, "I never did like this class of work—never!"

"Glorious lawsuits begin thus, though," returned the other.

"Glorious stirrings up of mud," retorted Mr. Creed, "and the dirt is sure to splash in the wrong faces! Fancy my making that dear little woman open up all the old history of her household skeleton for nothing! And what is the meaning of Mrs. Raven's present queer start? Did she have an hallucination when she began this quest?—or now when she has ended it?—or, as her son thinks, at the time she says it happened? Her bill shall be a pretty stiff one. I was afraid of some such work when we were to be called in for a special case that wasn't to go to the family solicitors. I wish you would be more careful, Dewe!"

And away, back to Ravenstoke, went Mrs. Raven of the Court, with only an old newspaper in her hand: but it seemed to her as if the porter's cries, nay, the very wheels of the train, repeated four words she had read therein:

"The madman, Theodore Agate!"

(To be continued.)

AMONG THE DAISIES.

AMONG the daisies she nestled down,
 And, plucking one tiny bud,
 She peeped through her lashes of hazel brown
 At its beautiful crimson hood;
 And shaking the ant from its tiny head,
 She lifted it up to her lips,
 And whispered *his* name, with a cheek as red
 As the bloom on its fragrant tips.

"I love him more than you love the star
 That watches your dreams at night;
 And his laughing presence is dearer far
 Than the dew to your chalice bright.
 Take care, take care that you never tell
 The folly I've whispered to you!"—
 And above its petals her kisses fell,
 Like the dripping of evening dew.

"I love! I love!" and her voice grew bland
 As the breeze from the gentle south;
 "I love! I love!"—but a strong brown hand
 Was laid o'er her smiling mouth.
 "You love; you love!"—and the brown hand twined
 Through the beams of her sunny hair.
 "They love; they love!" sang the tell-tale wind,
 Through the locks of the whispering pair.

And the shy wee daisy was borne away
 From the fluttering girlish breast,
 And the rough smith smiled as it coyly lay
 In the crease of his open vest;
 As though it were gracing the loveliest place
 In the forge where he gaily toiled,
 It smiled through the smoke, with its sweet round face,
 Till its leaves were all smeared and soiled.

Up went his sledge with a right good will,
 Then down with a merry clang;
 Louder and louder, and louder still,
 As he whistled the tunes *she* sang;
 And he tossed his crisp locks, as he blithely cried,
 "How delightful this toiling will be
 When you, love, are tending our own ingleside,
 And watching, my darling, for me.

* * *
 A rush of wind—and the daisy lay,
 'Mid the spoils on the smithy floor,
 Never to welcome the soft-eyed day,
 Or the song of the blackbird more!
 Then the blacksmith lifted the faded thing,
 Saying, "Little I thought that this,
 The most common flower of the field, could bring
 Such a vision of perfect bliss!" FANNY FORRESTER.

A MYSTERY.

I SHALL always say, always think, it was a curious thing we chanced to go that day, of all days, to Pigeon Green. It is not chance that brings about these strange coincidences.

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."

Pigeon Green, a small colony of a dozen houses, formed a triangle, as may be said, with Timberdale and Evesham, being a few miles distant from each. Old Mr. and Mrs. Beele, life-long friends of the Squire, lived here. Their nephew had brought his newly-married wife from London to show her to them, and we were all invited to dinner. As the Squire did not care to be out in the dark, his sight not being what it used to be, the dinner hour was fixed for two o'clock. We started in the large open phaeton, the Squire driving his favourite horses, Bob and Blister. It was the nineteenth of October. Mrs. Todhetley complained of the cold as we went along. The lovely weather of September had left us; early winter seemed to be setting in with a vengeance. The easterly wind was unusually high, and the skies were leaden.

On this same wintry morning Mr. St. George left Timberdale in his gig for Worcester, accompanied by Ellin Delorane. St. George had business to transact with Philip West, a lawyer, who was Mr. Delorane's agent in Worcester. Philip West lived in the Foregate Street, his offices being in the same house. Ellin was very intimate with his wife, formerly Mary Coney, and was invited to spend a few days with her. It was Aunt Hester who had urged the acceptance of this invitation: seeing that Ellin was nervous at the non-arrival of her lover, William Brook, was peeping into the newspapers for accounts of shipwrecks and other calamities at sea. So they set off after breakfast, Ellin well wrapped up, in this stylish gig of Mr. St. George's. There are gigs and gigs, you know, and I assure you some gigs were yet fashionable vehicles in those days.

It was bitterly cold. St. George, remarking that they should have snow as soon as the high wind would let it come down, urged his handsome grey horse to a fleet pace, and they soon reached Worcester. He drove straight to Foregate Street, which lay at the other end of the town, set down Ellin, and then went back again to leave his horse and gig at the Hare and Hounds in College Street, the inn at which he generally put up, retracing his steps on foot to Mr. West's.

And now I must return to ourselves.

After a jolly dinner at two o'clock with the Beeles, and a jolly dessert after it, including plenty of fresh filberts and walnuts, and

upon that a good cup of tea and some buttered toast, we began to think about getting home. When the phaeton came round, the Squire remarked that it was half an hour later than he had meant to start; upon which, old Beele laid the fault of its looking late to the ungenial weather of the evening.

We drove off. Dusk was approaching; the leaden skies looked dark and sullen, the wind, unpleasantly high all day, had increased to nearly a hurricane. It roared round our heads, it whistled wildly through the trees and hedges, it shook the very ears of Bob and Blister; the few flakes of snow or sleet beginning then to fall were whirled about in the air like demons. It was an awful evening, no mistake about that; and a very unusual one for the middle of October.

The Squire faced the storm as well as he could, his coat collar turned up, his cloth cap, kept for emergencies in a pocket of the carriage, tied down well on his ears. Mrs. Todhetley tied a knitted grey shawl right over her bonnet. We, in the back seat, had much ado to keep our hats on: I sat right behind the Squire, Tod behind Mrs. Todhetley. It was about the worst drive I remember. The wild wind, keen as a knife, stung our faces, and seemed at times as if it had a mind to whirl us, carriage and horses and all, in the air, as it was whirling the sleet and snow.

Tod stood up to speak to his father. "Shall I drive, sir?" he asked. "Perhaps you would be more sheltered if you sat here behind."

Tod's driving in those days was regarded by the Squire with remarkable disparagement, and Tod received only a sharp answer—which could not be heard for the wind.

We got along somehow in the teeth of the storm. The route lay chiefly through by-ways, solitary and unfrequented, not in the good, open turnpike roads. For about a mile, midway between Pigeon Green and Timberdale, was an ultra dreary spot; dreary in itself and dreary in its associations. It was called Dip Lane, possibly because the ground dipped there so much that it lay in a hollow; overgrown dark elm trees grew thickly on each side it, their branches nearly meeting overhead. In the brightest summer's day the place was gloomy, so you may guess how it looked now.

But the downward dip and the dark elm trees did not constitute all the dreariness of Dip Lane. Many years before, a murder had been committed there. The Squire used to tell us of the commotion it caused, all the gentlemen for miles and miles round bestirring themselves to search out the murderers. He himself was a little fellow of five or six years old, and could just remember what a talk it made. A wealthy farmer, belated, riding through the lane from market one dark night, was attacked and pulled from his horse. The assailants beat him to death, rifled his pockets of a large sum, for he had been selling stock, and dragged him *through the hedge*, making a large gap

in it. Across the field, near its opposite side, was the round, deep stagnant piece of water known as Dip Pond (popularly supposed to be too deep to have any bottom); and it was conjectured that the object of the murderers, in dragging him through the hedge, was to conceal the body beneath the dark and slimy water, and that they must have been disturbed by someone passing in the lane. Anyway, the body was found in the morning lying in the field a few yards from the gap in the hedge, pockets turned inside out, and watch and seals gone. The poor frightened horse had made its way home, and stayed whinnying by the stable door all night.

The men were never found. A labourer, hastening through the lane earlier in the evening, with some medicine from the doctor's for his sick wife, had noticed two foot-pads, as he described them, standing under a tree. That these were the murderers, then waiting for prey, possibly for this very gentleman they attacked, nobody had any doubt of; but they were never traced. Whoever they were, they got clear off with their booty, and—the Squire would always add when telling the story to a stranger—with their wicked consciences, which he sincerely hoped tormented them ever afterwards.

But the most singular fact in the affair remains to be told. From that night nothing would grow on the spot in the hedge over which the murdered man was dragged, and on which his blood had fallen. The blood-stains were easily got rid of, but the hedge, though replanted more than once, never grew again; and the gap remained in it still. Report went that the farmer's ghost haunted it—that, I am sure, you will not be surprised to hear, ghosts being so popular—and might be seen hovering around it on a moonlit night.

And amid the many small coincidences attending the story (my story) which I am trying to place clearly before you, was this one: that the history of the murder was gone over that day at Mr. Beele's. Some remark led to the subject as we sat round the dessert-table, and Mrs. Frank Beele, who had never heard of it, inquired what it was. Upon that, the Squire and old Beele recounted it to her, each ransacking his memory to help the other with fullest particulars.

To go on with our homeward journey. Battling along, we at length plunged into Dip Lane—which, to its other recommendations, added that of being inconveniently narrow—and Tod, peering outwards in the gloomy dusk, fancied he saw some vehicle before us. Bringing his keen sight to bear upon it, he stood up to reconnoitre, and made it out to be a gig, going the same way that we were. The wind was not quite so bad in this low spot, and the snow and sleet had ceased for a bit.

"Take care, father," said Tod: "there's a gig on ahead."

"A gig, Joe?"

"Yes, it's a gig: and going at a strapping pace."

But the Squire was going at a strapping pace also, and driving two fresh horses, whereas the gig had but one horse. We caught it up in

no time. It slackened speed slightly as it drew close to the hedge on that side, to give us room to pass. In a moment we saw it was St. George's gig, St. George driving.

"Halloa!" called out Tod as we shot by, and his shout was loud enough to frighten the ghost at the gap, which lively spot we were fast approaching, "there's William Brook! Father, pull up: there's William Brook!"

Brook was sitting with St. George. His coat was well buttoned up, a white woollen comforter folded round his neck and chin, and a low-crowned, wide-brimmed hat pulled down over his brows. I confess that but for Tod's shout I should not have recognised him—muffled up like that.

Anxious to get home, out of the storm, the Squire paid no heed to Tod's injunction of pulling up. He just turned his head for a moment towards the gig, but drove on at the same speed as before. All we could do was to call out every welcome we could think of to William Brook as we looked back, and to pull off our hats and wave them frantically.

William Brook pulled off his, and waved it to us in return. *I saw him do it.* He called out something also, no doubt a greeting. At least, I thought he did; but the wind swept by with a gust at the moment, and it might have been St. George's voice and not his.

"Johnny, lad, it's better than nuts," cried Tod to me, all excitement for once, as he fixed his hat on his head again. "How glad I am!—for Nelly's sake. But what on earth brings the pair of them—he and St. George—in Dip Lane?"

Another minute or so, and we reached the gap in the hedge. I turned my eyes to it and to the pond beyond it in a kind of fascination; I was sure to do so whenever I went by, but that was seldom; and the conversation at the dessert-table had opened the wretched details afresh. Almost immediately afterwards, the gig wheels behind us, which I could hear above the noise of the wind, seemed to me to come to a sudden standstill. "St. George has stopped," I exclaimed to Tod. "Not a bit of it," answered he; "we can no longer hear him." Nearly close upon that, we passed the turning which led out of the lane towards Evesham. Not heeding anything of all this, as indeed why should he, the Squire dashed straight onwards, and in time we gained our homestead, Crabb Cot.

The first thing the Squire did, when we were all gathered round the welcome fire, blazing and crackling with wood and coal, and the stormy blasts beat on the window panes but no longer upon us, was to attack us for making that noise in Dip Lane, and for shouting out that it was Brook.

"It was Brook, father," said Tod. "St. George was driving him."

"Nonsense, Joe," reprimanded the Squire. "William Brook has not landed from the high seas yet. And, if he had landed, what should bring him in Dip Lane—or St. George either?"

"It was St. George," persisted Tod.

"Well, that might have been. It looked like his grey horse. Where was he coming from, I wonder?"

"Mr. St. George went to Worcester this morning, sir," interposed Thomas, who had come in with some glasses, the Squire having asked for some hot brandy-and-water. "Giles saw his man Japhet this afternoon, and he said his master had gone off in his gig to Worcester for the day."

"Then he must have picked up Brook at Worcester," said Tod, in his decisive way.

"May be so," conceded the Squire, coming round to reason. "But I don't see what they could be doing in Dip Lane."

II.

THE storm had disappeared the following morning, but the ground was white with a thin coating of snow; and in the afternoon, when we started for Timberdale to call on William Brook, the sky was blue and the sun shining. Climbing up from the Ravine and crossing the field beyond it to the high road, we met Darbyshire, the surgeon, striding along as fast as his legs would carry him.

"You seem to be in a hurry," remarked the Squire.

"Just sent for to a sick patient over yonder," replied Darbyshire, nodding to some cottages in the distance. "Dying, the report is; supposed to have swallowed poison. Daresay it will turn out to be a case of cucumber."

He was speeding on when Tod asked whether he had seen William Brook yet. Darbyshire turned to face him, looking surprised.

"Seen Brook yet! No; how should I see him? Brook's not come, is he?"

"He got home last night. St. George drove him from Worcester in his gig," said Tod, and went on to explain that we had passed them in Dip Lane. Darbyshire was uncommonly pleased. Brook was a favourite of his.

"I am surprised that I have not seen him," he cried; "I have been about all the morning. St. George was in Worcester yesterday, I know. Wonder, though, what induced them to make a pilgrimage through Dip Lane!"

Just, you see, as the rest of us had wondered.

We went on towards Mrs. Brook's. But in passing Mr. Delorane's, Aunt Hester's head appeared above the Venetian blind of the dining-room. She began nodding cordially.

"How lively she looks," exclaimed the Squire. "Pleased that he is back, I take it. Suppose we go in?"

The front door was standing open, and we went in unannounced. Aunt Hester, sitting then at the little work-table, making herself a cap with lace and pink ribbons, got up and tried to shake hands with all three of us at once.

"We are on our way to call on William Brook," cried the Squire, as we sat down, and Aunt Hester was taking up her work again.

"On William Brook!—why, what do you mean?" she exclaimed. "Has he come?"

"You don't mean to say you did not know it—that he has not been to see you?" cried the Squire.

"I don't know a thing about it; I did not know he had come; nobody has told me," rejoined Aunt Hester. "As to his coming to see me—well, I suppose he would not feel himself at liberty to do that until Mr. Delorane gave permission. When did he arrive? I am so glad."

"And he is not much behind his time, either," observed Tod.

"Not at all behind it, to speak of, only we were impatient. The truth is, I caught somewhat of Ellin's fears," added Aunt Hester, looking at us over her spectacles, which she rarely wore higher than the end of her nose. "Ellin has had gloomy ideas about his never coming back at all; and one can't see a person perpetually sighing away in silence, without sighing a bit also for company. Did he get here this morning? What a pity Ellin is at Worcester!"

We told Aunt Hester all about it, just as we had told Darbyshire, but not quite so curtly, for she was not in a hurry to be off to a poisoned patient. She dropped her work to listen, and took off her spectacles, looking, however, uncommonly puzzled.

"What a singular thing—that you should chance to have been in Dip Lane just at the time they were!—and why should they have chosen that dreary route? But—but——"

"But what, ma'am?" cried the Squire.

"Well, I am thinking what could have been St. George's motive for concealing the news from me when he came round here last night to tell me he had left Ellin safely at Philip West's," replied she.

"Did he say nothing to you about William Brook?"

"Not a word. He said what a nasty drive home it had been in the teeth of the storm and wind, but he did not mention William Brook. He seemed tired, and did not stay above a minute or two. John was out.—Oh, here is John."

Mr. Delorane, hearing our voices, I suppose, came in from the office. Aunt Hester told him the news at once—that William Brook was come home.

"I am downright glad," interrupted the lawyer emphatically. "What with one delay and another, one might have begun to think him lost: it was September, you know, that he originally announced himself for. What do you say?"—his own words having partly drowned Aunt Hester's—"St. George drove him home last night from Worcester? Drove Brook? Nonsense! Had St. George brought Brook he would have told me of it."

"But he did bring him, sir," affirmed Tod: and he went over the history once more. Mr. Delorane did not take it in.

"Are these lads playing a joke upon me, Squire?" asked he.

"Look here, Delorane. That we passed St. George in Dip Lane is a fact; I knew the cut of his gig and horse. Somebody was with him; I saw that much. The boys called out that it was William Brook, and began shouting to him. Whether it was he, or not, I can't say; I had enough to do with my horses, I can tell you; they did not like the wind, Blister especially."

"It was William Brook, safe enough, sir," interposed Tod. "Do you think I don't know him? We spoke to him, and he spoke to us. Why should you doubt it?"

"Well, I suppose I can't doubt it, as you speak so positively," said Mr. Delorane. "The news took me by surprise, you see. Why on earth did St. George not tell me of it? I shall take him to task when he comes in. Anyway, I am glad Brook's come. We will drink his health."

He opened what was in those days called the cellaret—and a very convenient article it was for those who drank wine as a rule—and put on the table some of the glasses that were standing on the sideboard. Then we drank health and happiness to William Brook.

"And to somebody else also," cried bold Tod, winking at Aunt Hester.

"You two boys can go on to Mrs. Brook's," cried the Squire; "I shall stop here a bit. Tell William I am glad he has surmounted the perils of the treacherous seas."

"And tell him he may come to see me if he likes," added the lawyer. "I expect he did not get a note I wrote to him a few months back, or he'd have been here this morning."

Away we went to Mrs. Brook's. And the first thing that flabbergasted us (the expression was Tod's, not mine) was to be met by a denial of the servant's. Upon Tod asking to see Mr. William, she stared at us and said he was not back from his travels.

"Come in," called out Minty from the parlour; "I know your voices." She sat at the table, her paint-box before her. Minty painted very nice pieces in water colours: the one in process was a lovely bit of scenery taken from Little Malvern. Mrs. Brook was out.

"What did I hear you saying to Ann about William—that he had come home?" she began to us, without getting up from her work—for we were too intimate to be upon any ceremony with one another. "He is not come yet. I only wish he was."

"But he is come," said Tod. "He came last night. We saw him and spoke to him."

Minty put down her camel-hair pencil then, and turned round. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"Mr. St. George drove William home from Worcester. We passed them in the gig in Dip Lane."

Minty retorted by asking whether we were not dreaming; and for a

minute or two we kept at cross-purposes. She held to it that they had seen nothing of her brother ; that he was not at Timberdale.

"Mamma never had a wink of sleep last night, for thinking of the dreadful gale William must be in at sea. Your fancy misled you," went on Minty, calmly touching-up the cottage in her painting—and Tod looked as if he would like to beat her.

But it did really seem that William had not come, and we took our departure. I don't think I had ever seen Tod look so puzzled.

"I wish I may be shot if I can understand this!" said he.

"Could we have been mistaken in thinking it was Brook?" I was beginning ; and Tod turned upon me savagely.

"I swear it was Brook. There ! And you know it as well as I, Mr. Johnny. Where can he be hiding himself ? What is the meaning of it?"

It is my habit always to try to account for things that seem unaccountable ; to search out reasons and fathom them ; and you would be surprised at the light that will sometimes crop up. An idea flashed across me now.

"Can Brook be ill, Tod, think you?—done up with his voyage, or something—and St. George is nursing him at his house for a day or two before he shows himself to Timberdale?" And Tod thought it might be so.

Getting back to Mr. Delorane's, we found him and the Squire sitting at the table still. St. George, just come in, was standing by, hat in hand, and they were both tackling him at once.

"What do you say?" asked St. George of his master, when he got room for a word. "That I brought William Brook home here last night from Worcester ! Why, what can have put such a thing into your head, sir?"

"Didn't you bring him?" cried the Squire. "Didn't you drive him home in your gig?"

"That I did not. I have not seen William Brook."

He spoke in a ready, though surprised tone, not at all like one who is shuffling with the truth, or telling a fable, and looked from one to another of his two questioners, as if not yet understanding them. The Squire pushed his spectacles to the top of his brow and stared at St. George. He did not understand, either.

"Look here, St. George: do you deny that it was you we passed in Dip Lane last night—and your grey horse—and your gig?"

"Why should I deny it?" quietly returned St. George. "I drew as close as I could to the hedge as a matter of precaution to let you go by, Squire, you were driving so quickly. And a fine shouting you greeted me with," he added, turning to Tod, with a slight laugh.

"The greeting was not intended for you ; it was for William Brook," answered Tod, his voice bearing a spice of antagonism ; for he thought he was being played with.

St. George was evidently at a loss yet, and stood in silence. All in a moment, his face lighted up.

"Surely," he cried impulsively, "you did not take that man in the gig for William Brook!"

"It was William Brook. Who else was it?"

"A stranger. A stranger to me and to the neighbourhood. A man to whom I gave a lift."

Tod's face presented a picture. Believing, as he did still, that it was Brook in the gig, the idea suggested by me—that St. George was concealing Brook at his house out of good-fellowship—grew stronger and stronger. But he considered that, as it had come to this, St. George ought to say so.

"Where's the use of your continuing to deny it, St. George?" he asked. "You had got Brook there, and you know you had."

"But I tell you that it was not Brook," returned St. George.

"Should I deny it, if it had been he? You talk like a child."

"Has Brook been away so long that we shouldn't know him, do you suppose?" retorted quick-tempered Tod. "Why! as a proof that it was Brook, he shouted back his greeting to us, taking off his hat to wave it in answer to ours. Would a strange man have done that?"

"The man did nothing of the kind," said St. George.

"Yes, he did," I said, thinking it was time I spoke. "He called back a greeting to us, and he waved his hat round and round. I should not have felt so sure it was Brook but for seeing him without his hat."

"Well, I did not see him do it," conceded St. George. "When you began to shout in passing the man seemed surprised. 'What do those people want?' he said to me; and I told him you were acquaintances of mine. It never occurred to my mind, or to his either, I should imagine, but that the shouts were meant for me. If he did take off his hat in response, as you say, he must have done it, I reckon, because I did not take off mine."

"Couldn't you hear our welcome to him? Couldn't you hear us call him 'Brook'?" persisted Tod.

"I did not distinguish a single word. The wind was too high for that."

"Then we are to understand that Brook has not come back; that you did not bring him?" interposed the Squire. "Be quiet, Joe; can't you see you were mistaken? I told you you were, you know at the time. You and Johnny are for ever taking up odd notions, Johnny especially."

"The man was a stranger to me," spoke St. George. "I overtook him trudging along the road, soon after leaving Worcester; it was between Red Hill and the turning to Whittington. He accosted me, asking which of the two roads before us would take him to Evesham. I told him which, and was about to drive on when it occurred to me.

that I might as well offer to give the man a lift: it was an awful evening, and that's the truth: one that nobody would, as the saying runs, turn a dog out in. He thanked me, and got up; and I drove him as far as ——"

"Then that's what took you round by Dip Lane, St. George?" interrupted Mr. Delorane.

"That's what took me round by Dip Lane," acquiesced St. George, slightly smiling; "and which seems to have led to this misapprehension. But don't give my humanity more credit than it deserves. Previously to this I had been debating in my own mind whether to take the round, seeing what a journey was before me. It was about the wildest night I ever was out in, the horse could hardly make head against the wind, and I thought we might feel it less in the small and more sheltered by-ways than in the open road. The taking up the traveller decided me."

"You put him down in Dip Lane, at the turning that leads to Evesham," remarked the Squire.

"Yes, I put him down there. It was just after you passed us. He thanked me heartily, and walked on; and I drove quickly home, glad enough to reach it. Who he was, or what he was, I do not know, and did not ask."

Tod was still in a quandary; his countenance betrayed it. "Did you notice that he resembled William Brook, St. George?"

"No. It did not strike me that he resembled anyone. His face was well wrapped up from the cold, and I did not get a clear view of it: I am not sure that I should know it again. I should know his voice, though," he added quickly.

Poor Aunt Hester, listening to all this in dismay, felt the disappointment keenly: the tears were stealing down her face. "And we have been drinking his health, and—and feeling so thankful that he was safely back again!" she murmured gently.

"Hang it, yes," added Mr. Delorane. "Well, well; I daresay a day or two more will bring him. I must say I thought it odd that you should not have mentioned it to me, St. George, if he had come."

"I should have thought it very odd, sir," spoke St. George.

"Will you take a glass of wine?"

"No, thank you; I have not time for it. Those deeds have to be gone over, you know, sir, before post time," replied St. George; and he left the room.

"And if ever you two boys serve me such a trick again—bringing me over with a cock-and-bull story that people have come back from sea who haven't—I'll punish you," stuttered the Squire, too angry to speak clearly.

We went away in humility; heads down, metaphorically speaking, tails between legs. The Squire kept up the ball, firing away sarcastic reproaches hotly.

Tod never answered. The truth was, he felt angry himself. Not

with the Squire, but with the affair altogether. Tod hated mystification, and the matter was mystifying him utterly. With all his heart, with all the sight of his eyes, he had believed it to be William Brook: and he could not drive the conviction away, that it was Brook, and that St. George was giving him house-room.

"I don't like complications," spoke he resentfully.

"Complications!" retorted the Squire. "What complications are there in this? None. You two lads must have been thinking of William Brook, perhaps speaking of him, and so you thought you saw him. That's all about it, Joe."

The complications were not at an end. A curious addition to them was at hand. The Squire came to a halt at the turning to the Ravine, undecided whether to betake himself home at once, or to make a call first at Timberdale Court, to see Robert Ashton.

"I think we'll go there, lads," said he: "there's plenty of time. I want to ask him how that squabble about the hunting arrangements has been settled."

So we continued our way along the road, presently crossing it to take the one in which the Court was situated: a large handsome house, lying back on the right hand. Before gaining it, however, we had to pass the pretty villa rented by Mr. St. George, its stable and coach-house and dog-kennel beside it. The railway was on ahead; a train was shrieking itself at that moment into the station.

St. George's groom and man-of-all-work, Japhet, was sweeping up the leaves on the little lawn. Tod, who was in advance of us, put his arms on the gate. "Are you going to make a bonfire with them?" asked he.

"There's enough for't, sir," answered Japhet. "I never see such a wind as yesterday's," he ran on, dropping his besom to face Tod, for the man was a lazy fellow, always ready for a gossip. "I'm sure I thought it 'ud ha' blowed the trees down as well as the leaves."

"It was pretty strong," assented Tod, as I halted beside him, and the Squire walked on towards the Court. "We were out in it—coming home from Pigeon Green. There was one gust that I thought would have blown the horses right over."

"The master, he were out in it, too, a coming home from Worcester," cried Japhet, taking off his old hat to push his red hair back. "When he got in here, he said as he'd had enough on't for one journey. I should think the poor horse had too; his coat were all wet."

Tod lifted up his head, speaking impulsively. "Was your master alone, Japhet, when he got home? Had he anyone with him?"

"Yes, he were all alone, sir," replied the man. "Miss Delorane were with him when he drove off in the morning, but she stayed at Worcester."

Had Tod taken a moment for thought he might not have asked the question. He had nothing of the sneak in him, and would have

scorned to pump a servant about his master's movements. The answer tended to destroy his theory of Brook's being concealed here, and to uphold the account given by Mr. St. George.

Quitting the railings, we ran to catch up the Squire. And at that moment two or three railway passengers loomed into view, coming from the train. One of them was Ellin Delorane.

She came along briskly, with a buoyant step and a smiling face. The Squire dropped us a word of caution.

"Now don't go telling her of your stupid fancy about Brook, you two: it would only cause her disappointment." And with the last word we met her.

"Ah ha, Miss Ellin!" he exclaimed, taking her hands. "And so the truant's back again!"

"Yes, he is back again," she softly whispered, with a blush that was deep in colour.

The Squire did not quite catch the words. She and he were at cross-purposes. "We have but now left your house, my dear," he continued. "Your aunt does not expect you back to-day; she thought you would stay at Worcester till Saturday."

Ellin smiled shyly. "Have you seen him?" she asked in the same soft whisper.

"Seen whom, my dear?"

"Mr. Brook."

"Mr. Brook! Do you mean *William* Brook? He is not back, is he?"

"Yes, he is back," she answered. "I thought you might have seen him: you spoke of the return of the truant."

"Why, child, I meant you," explained the Squire. "Nobody else. Who says William Brook is back?"

"Oh, I say it," returned Ellin, her cheeks all rosy dimples. "He reached Worcester yesterday."

"And where is he now?" cried the Squire, feeling a little at sea.

"He is here, at Timberdale," answered Ellin. "Mr. St. George drove him home last night."

"There!" cried Tod with startling emphasis. "There, father, please not to disparage my sight any more."

Well, what do you think of this for another complication? It took me aback. The Squire rubbed his face, and stared.

"My dear, just let us understand how the land lies," said he, putting his hand on Ellin's shoulder. "Do you say that William Brook reached Worcester yesterday on his return, and that St. George drove him home here at night?"

"Yes," replied Ellin. "Why should you doubt it? It is true."

"Well, we thought St. George did drive him home," was the Squire's answer, staring into her face; "we passed his gig in Dip Lane and thought that it was Brook that he had with him. But St. George denies this. He says it was not Brook; that he has not

seen Brook, does not know he has come home ; he says the man he had with him was a stranger, to whom he was giving a lift."

Ellin looked grave for a moment ; then the smiles broke out again.

"St. George must have been joking," she cried ; "he cannot mean it. He happened to be at Worcester station yesterday when Mr. Brook arrived by the Birmingham train : we suppose he then offered to drive him home. Anyway, he did do it."

"But St. George denies that he did, Ellin," I said.

"He will not deny it to me, Johnny. Gregory West, returning from a visit to some client at Spetchley, met them in the gig together."

The Squire listened like a man dazed. "I can't make head or tail of it," cried he. "What does St. George mean by denying that he brought Brook?—And where *is* Brook?"

"Has nobody seen him?" questioned Ellin.

"Not a soul, apparently. Ellin, my girl," added the Squire, "we will walk back with you to your father's, and get this cleared up. Come along, boys."

So back we went to turn the tables upon St. George, Tod in a rapture of gratification. You might have thought he was treading upon eggs.

We had it out this time in Mr. Delorane's private office ; the Squire walked straight into it. Not but that "having it out" must be regarded as a figure of speech, for elucidation seemed farther off than before, and the complications greater.

Mr. Delorane and his head clerk were both bending over the same parchment when we entered. Ellin kissed her father, and turned to St. George.

"Why have you been saying that you did not drive home William Brook?" she asked as they shook hands.

"A moment, my dear ; let me speak," interrupted the Squire, who never believed anybody's explanation could be so lucid as his own. "Delorane, I left you just now with an apology for having brought to you a cock-and-bull story through the misleading fancies of these boys ; but we have come back again to tell you the story's true. Your daughter here says that it was William Brook that St. George had in his gig. And perhaps Mr. St. George"—giving that gentleman a sharp nod—"will explain what he meant by denying it?"

"I denied it because it was not he," said Mr. St. George, not appearing to be in the least put out. "How can I tell you it was Brook when it was not Brook? If it had been——"

"You met William Brook at the Worcester railway station yesterday afternoon," interrupted Ellin. "Mrs. James Ashton saw you there ; saw the meeting. You *were* at the station, were you not?"

"I was at the station," readily replied St. George, "and Mrs. James Ashton may have seen me there, for all I know—I did not see her. But she certainly did not see William Brook. Or, if she did, I didn't."

"Gregory West saw you and him in your gig together later, when you were leaving Worcester," continued Ellin. "It was at the top of Red Hill."

St. George shook his head. "The person I had in my gig was a stranger. Had Gregory West come up one minute earlier he would have seen me take the man into it."

"William *has* come," persisted Ellin.

"I don't say he has not," returned St. George. "All I can say is that I did not know he had come and that I have not seen him."

Who was right, and who was wrong? Any faces more hopelessly puzzled than the two old gentlemen's were, as they listened to these contradictory assertions, I'd not wish to see. Nothing came of the interview; nothing but fresh mystification. Ellin declared William Brook had arrived, had been driven out of Worcester for Timberdale in St. George's gig. We felt equally certain we had passed them in Dip Lane, sitting together in the gig, but St. George denied it in toto, affirming that the person with him was a stranger.

And perhaps it may be as well if I here say a word about the routes. Evesham lay fifteen miles from Worcester; Timberdale not much more than half that distance, in a somewhat different direction, and on a different road. In going to Timberdale, if when about half way here you quitted the high road for by-ways you would come to Dip Lane. Traversing nearly the length of the lane, you would then come to a by-way leading from it on the other side, which would bring you on the direct road to Evesham, still far off. Failing to take this by-way leading to Evesham, you would presently quit the lane, and by dint of more by-ways would gain again the high road and soon come to Timberdale. This is the route that Mr. St. George took that night.

We went home from Mr. Delorane's, hopelessly mystified, the Squire rubbing up his hair the wrong way; now blowing us both up for what he called our "faricies" in supposing we saw William Brook, and now veering round to the opposite opinion that we and Ellin must be alike correct in saying Brook had come.

Ellin's account was this: She passed a pleasant morning with Mary West, who was nearly always more or less of an invalid. At half past one o'clock dinner was served; Philip West, his younger brother Gregory, who had recently joined him, and Mr. St. George coming in from the office to partake of it. Dinner over, they left the room, having no time to linger. In fact, Gregory rose from table before he had well finished. Mary West inquired what his haste was, and he replied that he was off to Spetchley; some one had been taken ill there and wanted a will made. It was Philip who ought to have gone, who had been sent for; but Philip had an hour or two's business yet to do with Mr. St. George. Mrs. West told St. George that she would have tea ready at five o'clock, that he might drink a cup before starting for home.

Later on in the afternoon, when Ellin and Mrs. West were sitting over the fire, talking of things past and present, and listening to the howling of the wind, growing more furious every hour, James Ashton's wife came in, all excitement. Her husband, in medical practice at Worcester, was the brother of Robert Ashton of Timberdale. A very nice young woman was Marianne Ashton, but given to an excited manner. Taking no notice of Mrs. West, she flew to Ellin and began dancing round her like a demented Red Indian squaw.

"What will you give me for my news, Ellin?"

"Now, Marianne!" remonstrated Mrs. West. "Do be sensible, if you can."

"Be quiet, Mary: I am sensible. Your runaway lover is come, Ellin; quite safely."

They saw by her manner, heard by her earnest tone, that it was true. William Brook had indeed come, was then in the town. Throwing off her bonnet, and remarking that she meant to remain for tea, Mrs. James Ashton sat down to tell her story soberly.

"You must know that I had to go up to the Shrub Hill station this afternoon," began she, "to meet the Birmingham train. We expected Patty Silvester in by it; and James has been since a most unearthly hour this morning with some cross-grained patient, who must needs go and be ill at the wrong time. I went up in the brougham, and had hardly got on the platform when the train came in. There was a good deal of confusion; there always is, you know; passengers getting out and getting in. I ran about looking for Patty, and found she had not come: taken fright at the weather I suppose. As the train cleared off, I saw a figure that seemed familiar to me; it was William Brook; and I gave a glad shriek that you might have heard on the top of St. Andrew's spire. He was crossing the line with others who had alighted, a small black leather travelling bag in his hand. I was about to run over after him, when a porter stopped me, saying a stray engine was on the point of coming up, to take on the Malvern train. So, all I could do was to stand there, hoping he would turn his head and see me. Well: just as he reached the opposite platform, Mr. St. George stepped out of the station-master's office, and I can tell you there was some shaking of hands between the two. There's my story."

"And where is he now?"

"Oh, they are somewhere together, I suppose; on their way here perhaps," rejoined Mrs. James Ashton carelessly. "I lost sight of them: that ridiculous stray engine the man spoke of puffed up at the minute, and stopped right in front of me. When it puffed on again, leaving the way clear, both he and St. George had vanished. So I got into the brougham to bring you the news in advance, lest the sudden sight of William the deserter should cause a fainting fit."

Ellin, unable to control herself, burst into glad tears of relief. "You don't know what a strain it has been," she said. And she sat

listening for his step on the stairs. But William Brook did not come.

At five o'clock punctually the tea was brought in, and waited for some little time on the table. Presently Mr. West appeared. When they told him he was late, he replied that he had lingered in the office expecting Mr. St. George. St. George had left him some time before to go to the Shrub Hill station, having business to see to there, and had promised to be back by tea-time. However, he was not back yet. Mr. West was very glad to hear of the arrival of William Brook, and supposed St. George was then with him.

Before the tea was quite over, Gregory West got back from Spetchley. He told them that he had met St. George just outside the town, and that he had a gentleman in his gig. He, Gregory West, who was in his brother's gig, pulled up to ask St. George whether he was not going home earlier than he had said. Yes, somewhat, St. George called back, without stopping: when he had seen what sort of a night it was going to be, he thought it best to be off as soon as he could.

"Of course it was William Brook that he had with him, Gregory!" exclaimed Mary West, forgetting that her brother-in-law had never seen William Brook.

"I cannot tell," was the only answer the young lawyer could give. "It was a stranger to me: he wore a lightish-coloured overcoat and a white comforter."

"That's he," said Mrs. James Ashton. "And he had on new tan-coloured kid gloves: I noticed them. I think St. George might have brought him here, in spite of the roughness of the night. He is jealous, Ellin."

They all laughed. But never a shadow of doubt rested on any one of their minds that St. George was driving William Brook home to Timberdale. And we, as you have heard, saw him, or thought we saw him, in Dip Lane.

And for the particulars of Mr. St. George's counter-statement, and other remarkable statements, we must wait for the next and concluding paper.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.



IN THE BLACK FOREST.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"
"ROUND ABOUT NORWAY," &c.



BLACK FOREST HUT.

AT nine o'clock one morning, with blue skies and a prospect of fair weather; with shadows shortening and disappearing as the sun ran his upward course; I started for Triberg, a three or four days' drive from Baden. A landau drawn by a stout pair of horses had been placed at my disposal, but as it was what is called a return carriage, the sum charged was considerably less than it would otherwise have been. The landlord of the Hotel Victoria had struck the bargain with the coachman, and arranged matters with his usual kindness. It would indeed be difficult to

say too much in favour of the courtesy and attention of Herr Grosholz towards his guests.

The only mistake made—and one to be deplored—was that, instead of at the outset taking the way by the exquisite valley of the Murg, the coachman drove straight through the flat, uninteresting high road to Achern. This occupies about three hours, and is perhaps the most dismal bit of road in the whole of the Black Forest. Fortunately, I had already explored some portion of the Murgthal, but the beauty of what I had seen only made me regret the more what we had now passed over.

For there are lovely views to be found in the valley of the Murg—some of the finest in the Black Forest. Take for instance the view from the New Castle of Eberstein—a wonderfully pleasant drive from Baden, through a road that winds up into forests and down into hollows; taking you into the heart of the woods; buried out of sight and sound of all human life and habitation; yielding the very utmost enjoyment of the fresh pure delight of these sylvan retreats and solitudes as you are drawn swiftly through the air by strong, willing horses; whilst the scent of the pines comes over you in faint, delicious

wafts, and the rustle and murmur of the trees make music for you as you journey.

It was after such a drive that the view suddenly burst upon me just outside the gateway of the Castle of Eberstein. An immense, fertile valley stretched before one, through which the Murg wound its rapid, white, frothy, shallow course. The slopes on which stood the castle were in part cleared and cultivated, in part still given up to the pines and their sombre verdure. For whilst it is refreshing to be in the midst of the pine forests, undoubtedly they have a melancholy influence when looked upon from a distance.

In the valley, on the borders of the stream, great saw mills were at work, and it is pleasant to enter these mills and watch primitive machinery doing its labour, and revel in the pine scent the sawdust so prodigally throws out. Small villages were dotted about; and opposite, rose other pine hills, until the ranges seemed to meet and close in the scene. To the left stretched the valley of the Rhine, bounded in the far distance by the soft and graceful undulations of the Vosges mountains.

The castle itself was worth inspection. A half courtyard, half garden with old-fashioned flowers formed a picturesque entrance within the gates: and the old armour, the stained glass, the curiosities, ending with the ancient pictures in the oratory, the polished floors and low, wainscotted rooms with their subdued lights, all sent one for the time being into a glorious mediæval age, where all was quaint, bold and vigorous: an age of sunflowers and æstheticism, perhaps, but manly and earnest; and guiltless of all the effeminate absurdity that has distinguished the movement of a later age—and must soon cease to be.

Above all, the view from the windows was glorious, framed as it was by the old-fashioned windows which opened to it from all sides of the castle. Terraces of flowers brightened the slopes immediately beneath; and still lower, the vineyards spread their green leaves, suggesting ideas of rich and ruby cups, and sparkling wine, and a hospitality that should be freely given by all who have freely received.

A young bride and bridegroom—the former one of the loveliest and most graceful girls I had ever seen: both of them the very types for this beautiful old place—joined me in the inspection under the guidance of a youthful and singularly civil housekeeper—a very different character from the quaint, original old woman who had taken us through the cold, creepy dungeons of the New Castle of Baden. This happy pair, I think, threw an extra glamour and romance over the building by their devotion to each other, which was as chivalrous as ever could have been the devotion of any one of the knights who, in ancient days, had worn the armour that surrounded us. One enjoyed and entered into their unmistakable happiness—for what is life worth if it is not gilded by a ready sympathy with the joys and sorrows of our fellow pilgrims?

It was all this, and more, that the coachman had shirked in taking the short cut to Achern.

The landlord of the inn at Achern said this was a source of frequent complaint. The coachmen would avoid the Murgthal when they possibly could, and when travellers were not on their guard. But it is difficult to be on your guard against an unknown evil. As in this instance, the discovery comes too late to be remedied. They are very fond also of shirking the Mummelsee. All this saves a day's journey, whilst the full price has usually been charged. Let everyone, therefore, expressly stipulate for the Murgthal and the Mummelsee.

Allerheiligen was to be the first day's destination, and now, at Achern, I found that it was impossible for the horses to do the Mummelsee, and also to reach Allerheiligen that evening. The distance would be too much for them. The coachman, as usual, had intended to shirk the lake. This, at least, could be remedied, but only by taking another carriage at Achern, and arranging for the Baden coachman to meet me at the point where the roads for Allerheiligen and the Mummelsee met at right angles.

So in this second conveyance I started for the Mummelsee, and mentally registered two resolutions. *Primo*: as this was the first time I had ever taken a return carriage, so it should be the last. *Secondo*: that in future all arrangements and agreements should be so clearly defined as to render any mistake or misunderstanding impossible.

The road, as far as Achern, had been dreary and monotonous in the extreme: now all this was changed. At once we entered again into the region of the eternal mountains, clad with their endless pines. As we clattered through the small town of Achern, the people came to their doors and windows to see who thus woke the echoes of their "calm and cool retreats." They were all dressed in their best; for, reader, it was Sunday. If you quarrel with the confession, I cannot help it. Truth must out. I can only admit that I would rather it had been Saturday or Monday; that in all cases, where it is possible, Sunday should be kept as a day of rest both for man and beast. But abroad, if anywhere, the old saying that "in Rome you must do as Rome does" is not of infrequent application. Circumstances in part control our actions and determine our course, and we have to bend to them. I do not refer to matters simply of amusement, such as visiting a theatre on a Sunday, or attending a ball. This must be at all times optional, and he who transgresses settles the matter with his own conscience—if he can. But in the ordinary circumstances, the necessities, the every-day routine of life abroad, there are times when Sunday cannot be observed absolutely after the manner of our English ideas.

Roadside cottages enlivened our way. A Sabbath calm seemed to fill the air, even in this land, where Sunday is rather a day of rejoicing and recreation, feasting and merrymaking, pleasure parties and excur-

sions, than a day devoted to religion. The coachman, too, had put on his Sunday's best; but he had passed his meridian, and the maidens no longer looked after him as they had probably looked after him twenty years ago; when, judging by what remained, he must have been a vigorous and handsome youth.

He whipped up his horses, and presently we came to the inn where the road to the Mummelsee branched off to the left. Here, resting a few moments, I found the landlord young, handsome, intelligent, and enterprising, and doing his best to learn English with the help of an English lady who had settled in the village: dangerous occupation, if the lady was fair and fascinating.

We continued our way. The road narrowed, and for a time took upon itself almost the likeness of an English lane. The surrounding scenery was varied and beautiful. Distant mountains opposed our progress. Vast pine forests stretched away and away, in which, apparently, a man might lose himself and wander about for ever. But immediately around us the landscape was more open, somewhat more sylvan and rural: "a valley laughing with green pastures and running streams."

After a time we came to an inn at the foot of the mountain. Here, rather than give the horses more work—and also because a climb through the wood would be far pleasanter—we left the carriage, and the coachman set out with me towards the Mummelsee: a lake some distance up the height.

Wild and weird enough was the way, as we left the ordinary path and plunged boldly into the midst of brambles and ferns, wild flowers and wild fruit. The guide who accompanied me—more for pleasure than because his services were necessary—seemed to know every inch of the ground, and enjoyed the fun as much as a schoolboy. Before he had gone a hundred yards or so his jacket was off, and his white shirt-sleeves stood out in cool contrast with the sombre pines.

Yet the way was anything but sombre. The sun overhead shot down its rays, throwing lights and shadows across our path, and destroying all sense of gloom. Through the trees we caught glimpses of a blue sky, pure and deep as a sapphire, that, in conjunction with the fresh breeze blowing, raised our spirits to the point of exhilaration; that nameless, peculiar sense of happiness that creeps over one amidst such scenes, and such scenes only.

There was a solemnity, if you will, about the wood and the walk; a sense of majesty and grandeur and illimitable power inseparable from all vast expanses, such as the sky, the sea, a great mountain, an apparently boundless forest. But the gloom and sadness would only enfold this wood with the setting of the sun, when the shadows would be lost in the darkness, and the desolation of night took the place of all that was now bright and beautiful.

The guide, despite his middle age, skipped about like a wild cat, now disappearing for a moment, and now suddenly returning with a

branch of wild raspberries, rich, ripe, large, luscious, such as I had never seen before, never expect to see again. These he presented with an air and a grace that is born with a good many of these men : that in their station of life comes neither from cultivation nor observation, and to the Englishman of corresponding rank comes never at all. For himself, he did not care for the wild raspberries : his weakness was bilberries, which grew large too, and abundant, but, reader, were not half so good.

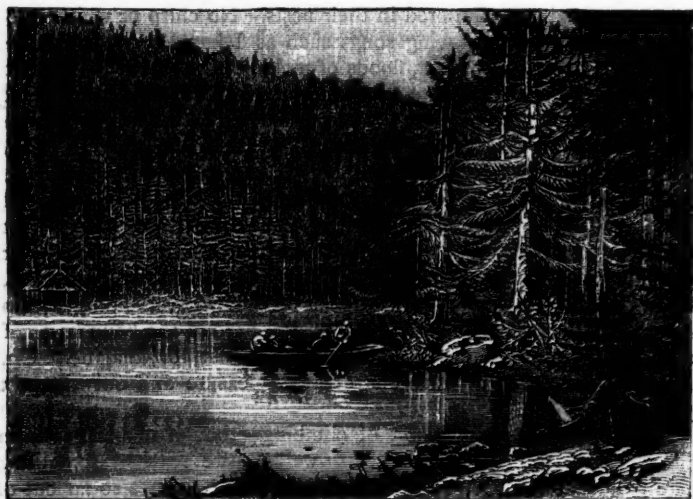
The scent of the pines accompanied us on our upward scramble, and, beneath our feet, a carpet more beautiful than any that ever came from a weaver's loom. Innumerable wild flowers and ferns and delicate shrubs spread their store. But still the birds sang not, nor flew from bough to bough, nor fluttered in their nests. No chirp or whistle, no long-drawn notes ; no raving songs such as I have heard in Alpine groves, where, day and night, floods of melody never ceased—no, not for a moment—from the rapturous throats of the nightingales and the exquisite note of the blackcap. There is a certain old Alpine château, sleeping far above the plain of the Isère, and looking down upon the vast valley, and the sleeping village, and the flowing river, and confronting the opposite range of gigantic hills : a certain old château, with its groves and gardens, dear to the memory of days that never, never can return. I have listened hour after hour, week after week, to an unbroken flood of music from these feathered songsters, that died away only with the spring : a constant, never-ending stream of melody, that those who have not passed beyond the boundaries of a northern clime can never dream of, or realise, or imagine. Oh, memory ! memory ! at once our greatest pleasure and our sharpest pain !

At length, after a good bit of climbing—though climbing within the capacities of the most ordinary walker—we reached something like table-land, and soon came to the lake that reposes so far out of the world, so far above it.

Dark, gloomy, and sombre it looked to-day, in spite of a brilliant sky. Dark, gloomy, and sombre pines fringed it all around, and cast their shadows upon the water, which looked cruel, yea, hungering for a victim. In this land of legends, and wild superstitions, and stories of the supernatural, there is no more favoured spot than the Mummelsee ("Fairy lake," by interpretation), for the arena, if the term may be applied, of marvellous tales and tragedies, the haunts and the deeds of a race other than man. Fays and fairies, goblins and ghouls, imps and vampires, hold revels here, and work their spells, and enchant the unwary. Enchant them in the literal sense of the word ; not as beauty attracts its votaries, but as the snake its victim. ³⁰

But the tales and legends of the Mummelsee are for the most part of evil omen and unhappy termination ; terrible and portentous, as befits the aspect of the lake and its desolate situation. Cavaliers lured to their destruction ; men, young and handsome, whose hearts

have been won by the fays, then deliberately broken, until the victims have lost their beauty, grown wan and pale, and passed away into spectre-land, silently as one of its inhabitants ; pursued to their death by a fate cruel and persistent ; dying, yet making no sign. One tradition has it, that a fairy would bewitch her lover, lure him to her realms ; there he would live happily, until, in a fatal hour, he betrayed the secret of his love. In a moment a small dart stabbed him to the heart ; from the depths of the lake would rise a wild despairing cry, that floated far into space over the tops of melancholy pines which seemed to rustle and sigh in mournful sorrow and sympathy—and a red tinge, the life-blood of the victim, would rise and spread itself on the surface of the water.

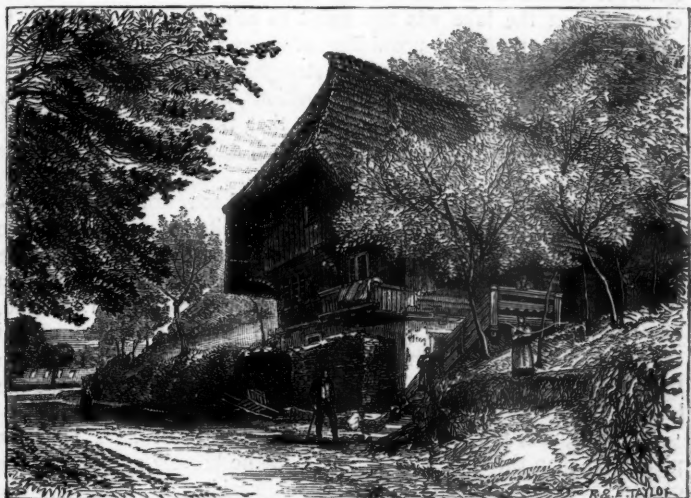


THE MUMMELSEE.

Cold and cruel, dark and green, the waters looked to-day. The lake is not large, but its remote situation, its wild aspect, its unbroken setting of fir trees, its absolute solitude and desolation, throw their weird influence upon the spectator and encompass him with a spell. Of the few lakes in the Black Forest, it is, in consequence, the most interesting and romantic, the one least to be neglected. The other lakes are found in the ordinary way-side, sea-level experience ; and though interesting, perhaps beautiful after their kind, they are at best insignificant and of small reputation. The Mummelsee has a distinct individuality of its own, both as to aspect and position. It has one more feature to enhance its charms—it is found only after a certain amount of climbing and hard work. We know how it is in human nature to set store by that which is attained with

labour and toil, and to lightly esteem what has been lightly gained. A trite saying it may be, but, alas for mankind, a very true one.

There was a solitary hut on the borders of the lake, where of course all sorts of wines, beer and spirits were dispensed, including the inevitable kirschwasser, which is to be found all over the Black Forest: excellent when good—a somewhat rare occurrence: abominably bad when inferior. Twice only I tasted in this national decoction the true flavour of the cherry, when it was asked for in this “promiscuous” or wandering fashion: and one of these occasions was in the Albthal, at the little half-way inn where the diligence stopped ten minutes to rest the horses. Perhaps, to be quite just, I ought also to state that only once did I find the kirschwasser so



ON THE ROAD TO ALLERHEILIGEN.

terrible that I thought I was poisoned for good and all, and gave myself up for lost. This, too, by a strange coincidence, was in the Albthal, on a return journey, but at another road-side inn.

At the hut we found a boat, and a youth ready to paddle us about the lake, if we possessed courage equal to a possible encounter with the ghouls and fairies that inhabited its depths. Our spirits answering to the strain, we soon found ourselves quietly rowing about, taking in from the centre of the water all surrounding points. Gloomy indeed were they, and sombre, whether we contemplated the water or the shore, or the pines that so sadly closed us in on all sides.

And as if to prove that fairies were indeed at work, suddenly a black cloud obscured our sky, a rushing wind took the surface of the lake, and went sighing and souging through the trees, bending their

feathery tops, as if they were the plumes of a hearse about to assist at our funeral rites, whilst the blast sang a strain that sounded like a cruel requiem. It turned bitterly cold, and we, heated with walking, began to shiver and tremble, and to wonder if, after all, the spirits of the lake were at work and one more victim at least was sought for the sacrifice. My guide quickly donned his jacket; and to destroy all the romance and picturesqueness of the situation by stepping at one bound from the sublime to the ridiculous, he proceeded to envelop his head in a coloured pocket-handkerchief, as a precaution against toothache, to which he said he was a martyr.

The squall was as sudden as it was unexpected, and as distinctly unpleasant as either. The surface of the water was disturbed, and our boat rocked us a cradle song in which there was no soothing element; but the lake was too small to admit of real waves, or to suggest at any time the possibility of danger. Well that it was so, for our craft was a crazy old tub of strange, mysterious construction; we had to keep exactly balancing positions, and the slightest move to the right or left produced a lurch that threatened to send us to the fairies in a very summary, unsolicited, and possibly unwelcome condition.

But we landed in safety and rejoicing: and to restore circulation—I had almost said animation—sought the shelter of the hut and the restoring properties of kirschwasser. It was grateful as manna in the desert; and for once I blessed the inevitable restaurant (truly a *restaurant* in this instance) at the top of the mountain. (In Holland, *par parenthèse*, they even go so far as to have one half-way up the tower of Utrecht Cathedral, and thus agreeably combine religion with pleasure and profit. I never found an endeavour to make the best of both worlds carried quite so far as this anywhere else.)

To the guide, the strong waters of the hut must have been far pleasanter than the waters of the lake, for he bravely returned to the charge, and, I was glad to see, was himself again in a very few minutes. But he informed me in confidence that this spirit was an imitation kirschwasser, more palatable than the real thing, but less wholesome. To us, however, its healing properties were grateful and potent.

So, having recovered, we took our downward journey. Suddenly as the squall had come up, as suddenly it passed over, and warmth and sunshine once more accompanied our steps. It had been a singular coincidence. Had a storm been ordered to bring out the weird, wild, gloomy desolation of the Mummelsee, it could not have arrived more punctually or more *à propos*. Once more, I say, sunshine accompanied our steps—and rough and rapid they sometimes were. The guide enlivened the way by describing some of his excursions to the Mummelsee, and the curious people he had piloted. By this time, it is unnecessary to say, the handkerchief had been withdrawn, though the jacket kept its place.

"But often as I have been to the Mummelsee," said he, "never yet have I experienced so sudden a storm as we had to-day. Truly I wondered what was coming next, and whether the fairies at the bottom of the lake were brewing us mischief. How cold it was, too!" he added with a shiver. "I was not sorry to land."

"Do you then put faith in the evil spirits?" I asked.

"Yes and no," he replied with a laugh. "Our land is a very cradle of superstitious tales and legends. Our mothers rock us to sleep with them before we can take in their meaning. In childhood our minds are crammed with them, and at that period we believe all we hear. In manhood we try to shake off these impressions; but something of their influence will stick to us in spite of our reason. I am not sure that I should be very much surprised if I saw a fairy rise to the surface of the lake and charm me into the fatal plunge."

"At any rate," I said, "you would know what it meant and what to expect."

"Yes," he returned. "And—who can tell—the change might be for the better. Existence down there might have some charms; up here we work hard and get badly paid."

"Would you row across the lake at midnight?" I asked him out of curiosity; "or even approach it at that hour?"

"I think so," he answered, "but I have never been tried. I am not wanting in courage of that sort. But there are hundreds who would not venture near it after dark for all the wealth of the Duchy. If they did they would die of fright or go mad, and drown themselves in the water."

"That would come to very much the same thing as if the fairies themselves had accomplished the disaster."

"Yes," replied Jehu. "And you may be sure there would be plenty of people ready to believe it was supernatural work; and they would become more than ever convinced of the existence and evil influence of the water spirits."

He gathered bilberries and raspberries as he talked, reaching the inn with a handful of branches of the former, which he carefully stowed away to take home with him; declaring that his wife had a cunningly devised way of serving them up in a dish worth a king's ransom. I was sorry when the walk was over, and the forest and the lake, the wild flowers and the luscious fruit were all left behind. But time was passing, and if *Afterheiligen* was to be reached before night-fall (a consummation devoutly to be wished), there must be no further loitering on the road.

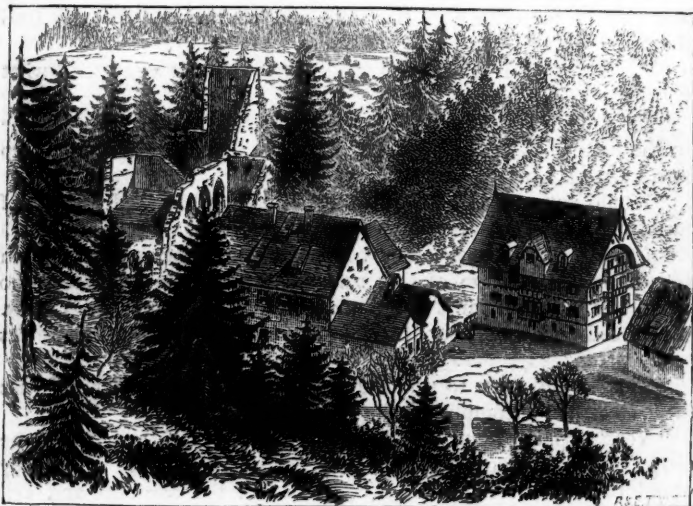
So the horses were put to, and Jehu took something for the good of the house, and was quite willing to bear my share of this burden in addition to his own. We left the young landlord flirting with two pretty girls who had just arrived, and were very much welcomed. He was equally dividing his favours, and evidently wondering on which of

the two laughing syrens his choice would eventually fall. Involuntarily the words occurred to me :

" Oh, pluck the rose of love the while
Life, joy and beauty on ye smile,
While loving ye are loved."

Probably he had never heard of Tasso, or the Garden of Armida, or the song of the bird ; but human nature is the same through all the ages ; and the thoughts that Tasso conceived in the 16th century as he vainly endeavoured to study law in dreary Padua, may be equally applied in the 19th. So the young landlord of the inn and his two pretty companions unconsciously found.

We left them behind, happy, contented, wanting nothing more,



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nothing better than the pleasures of the passing hour ; tasting life with a careless enjoyment only they, and such as they, can experience : not wanting too much, and so not missing their grasp of life and happiness. Thrice happy mortals. As Julia Kavanagh has remarked in one of her pastoral, reflective stories, we have all of us, if the truth were known, played our stakes on the game of life and lost ; but these humble and contented beings, realising only the hour and the day, have played a very simple game and suffered comparatively little loss.

We returned the road we came (only on life's road is there no turning back), and Jehu, after his late somewhat unwonted gambols up and down the mountain, gave serious attention to his horses ; and I, like Harvey, fell into meditations which were abruptly put to flight by arriving at the inn where we had appointed to meet the carriage.

We were true to our time ; it was not. So, to pass the minutes, the young landlord escorted me to the arbour, evidently to air and exercise his English ; whilst I conscientiously praised his accent, the while I drank and praised his coffee. He spoke good French, too, which he had learned in Paris. Then up came the tardy carriage, and he wished me a happy journey, with a handshake that I yet feel, and shall ever remember ; whilst the fat, very fat Pater—evidently the real lord and master of the establishment—looked on with evident and not undue pride at his son and successor. We turned our backs upon all this, and went on our way towards Allerheiligen.

And speaking of handshakes, *par parenthèse*, how much there is in the action ; how different in varying individuals ; how warmed and



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chilled, attracted or repelled, you may be by a handshake. A whole chapter might be written upon the subject, full of subtle analysis and sage deductions ; full of signs and tokens, and rules for application. I remember once reading a paper "On Street Door Knocks," pretending to read people's characters by their way of knocking. This seemed a somewhat uncertain test, and I wondered at the time what fine shades of distinction the writer would bring into single knocks or the postman's knock. But a handshake bears its own peculiar testimony to a man's character, just as much as the expression of the eyes or the mouth, or the tone of the voice.

We went our way towards Allerheiligen—a very glorious way, full of beauty and grandeur. The day was on the wane, and the afternoon shadows were lengthening. The coachman, full of contrition for having

shirked the Murgthal; or, to put it in his own words, "for not having known that I cared about seeing the Murgthal"—for I had had it out with him very seriously with the landlord at Achern, who made common cause with me against the practice—pointed out every spot of interest, posted me up in the name of every village, and gave me the history of every wayside house.

The backward views were magnificent, as we wound upwards into the forests. Far off mountains stretched away one behind another, and valleys and plains and villages lay sleeping below. But the trees soon overshadowed us and shut it all out, and the breeze stirred the pines with a sad melancholy sound. Great shadows cast by the declining sun stretched across our path. Much of the time we might have been winding up grand, well-kept avenues belonging to some ancient estate. To our right ran a narrow, shallow, babbling stream, frothing angrily over huge stones, running on for ever and for ever. Nature seems to mock man with its apparent immutability—man, vain man, dressed with so brief authority, who plays out his seven ages and disappears as a tale that is told, whilst the monarch of the forest is yet in his infancy.

Far up the slopes through the trees we had lovely glimpses; could trace the long shadows, and revel in a wealth of wild verdure; bracken, ferns and flowers. Now and then we passed a roadside inn, landmarks evidently known to the coachman, at which he cast long, lingering looks. Things were quiet this evening; doors were closed; nothing was in disorder. For all that could be seen stirring, the inns might have been deserted; probably were so, for the road was unfrequented and customers were few—especially on a Sunday evening. The inn-people were no doubt taking holiday, assembling at each other's houses, and making merry. The whole road was desolate and deserted; there was nothing but the trees and the shadows to bear us company; no sound to disturb the stillness but the running stream and the horses' feet as they beat the hard road, sending echoes up the slopes to play hide and seek amongst the trees. But this solitude has its charm.

Finally we reached the summit, and then began rapidly to descend into the valley by steep winding paths. Twilight was now falling. Great pine mountains on all sides stretched far above us, looking, in the gathering gloom, black as Erebus. We were descending, as it seemed, into the depths of the earth; gloom and desolation encompassed us. The air felt damp and cold: a mist was wreathing about some of the higher trees; yet the whole picture was inconceivably wild, grand and beautiful—for this descent into Allerheiligen, the situation of the place, the surrounding scene, is one of the finest things in the Black Forest.

At length the little settlement: a group of modern buildings side by side with an old ruin, mixing up together past and present in strange incongruous fashion. Nothing more lonely and desolate

could be conceived than the situation of Allerheiligen ("All Saints" by interpretation). Here, in one day, had the usual order of things been reversed; for whilst a lake is not generally found on the top of a mountain, and a monastery frequently buries itself far up some lonely height, the Mummelsee had been found only after hard climbing, and the monks of Allerheiligen had sheltered themselves in the depths of the earth. But, to do the old monks justice, they were as secluded, as retired from the world here, as they would have been perched upon some Alpine peak—whilst the situation was infinitely more depressing.

The monastery is said to have been founded in 1190 by the widow of the Count of Altdorf, brother of the Duke of Bavaria. After a wedded life of great unhappiness she bethought herself of founding a monastery, and the site was to be determined by an ass laden with bags of gold. Where the gold first touched the ground, there the monastery should be erected.

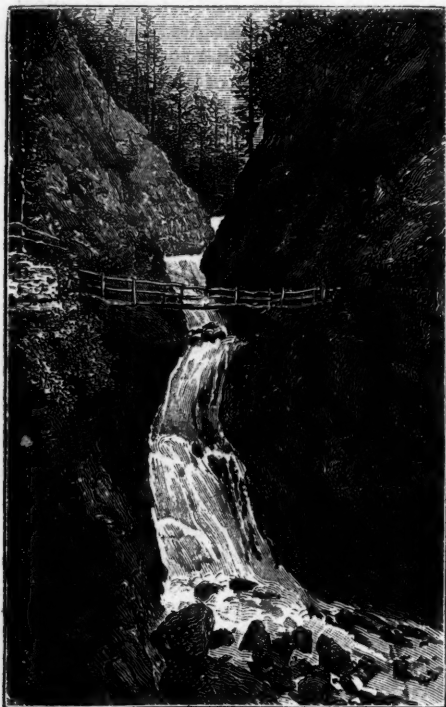
In this lovely and secluded spot the abbey rose. First, a small building; then, as it increased in wealth and strength, it extended to larger and yet larger dimensions. For centuries it was rich, famous, and sought after: by those unhappy men who had found the world too much for them, and were thankful to bury themselves in a living tomb—the dead alive, one might say; or by those novices who had not yet tried the world, and through mistaken zeal and fervour—the lofty aspiration and ideal which so often accompany youth, alas, so seldom outlive that period!—hoped to find their dreams realised in the daily round of monotonous duties, the exercise of a narrow and narrowing creed—and hoped in vain.

But—to pause one moment—why should our aspirations and ideals so seldom outlive the period of youth and romance? It is true, we seldom find our dreams realised in this world. Nay, the world does its best to disillusion and destroy what it cannot comprehend. As continual dropping wears away a stone, so contact with the world proves too much for most men who set out on the road of life with aims and hopes that world calls utopian, chimerical. Nevertheless, no matter how our dreams and ideals perish, as perish they will, it is well for a man, come what may, to keep before him an ideal standard which he feels sure exists, however seldom it is discovered. And he who has found even his one hero may be thankful, and go on his way rejoicing. It is not given to all men to see the longing of their soul satisfied.

For many centuries the monastery flourished. Then there came a time when monasteries were abolished; and finally, in 1803, the Abbey of Allerheiligen was struck by lightning and destroyed. It now remains a picturesque but not extensive ruin; a monument of departed glory; a wreck of wrecks—type of the lives it once sheltered.

It lies in a deep, narrow hollow or ravine. Closely, abruptly sur-

rounding it rise the lone hills clad to their summits with sombre pines. A spot more dreary and desolate need not be, in spite of its grandeur and beauty. To live a month, even a week in that place, would be to go hopelessly melancholy. With it all there was a feeling of unrest and disquiet. The stream rushes down and for ever rushes, filling all the air with its ceaseless murmur. No matter that the murmur does not rise to a roar, it is always there, day and night, summer and winter, in season and out of season. This, and the closely surrounding



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hills press down upon and seem to suffocate you; a weird sensation takes possession of you; some invisible influence in the air is working its spells; there is enchantment going on; the spirits of the dead-and-gone monks are about. Who or what is to exorcise them? I could not describe the effect Allerheiligen had upon me.

The coachman cracked his whip in true German style as we swept into the courtyard—if the open space may be dignified by the term; the landlord came out with empressement as the carriage drew up with a flourish. Mine host had a keen eye to business, and was glad to welcome an addition to his list of visitors. Next I was piloted across the

road to the other portion of the settlement, and given a room which looked on to the pine slopes, where the stream beat its ceaseless babble upon the brain.

Before daylight quite faded I went down to look at the waterfall which makes Allerheiligen famous, and of which much is said. I soon found that, far down as the ruin and the settlement seemed, there was a yet lower depth beyond. The valley narrowed into a cleft as I walked, and seemed about to close in. Soon an extra rush and roar told me I was approaching the cataract, and in a few moments I stood above a zig-zag waterfall that fell in numerous and picturesque

cascades over a bed of rocks. Had the volume of water been greater, so in proportion would have been the effect ; but [it was just now even smaller than usual. Very pretty, but not by any means sublime.

The situation of the fall is wild and romantic in the extreme, and the rocky heights on either side seem to guard it with angry jealousy. Zig-zag ladders conduct you to the bottom, and sundry rustic bridges span the chasm. The cataract finally empties itself in a small basin, and then flows onward less turbulently on its course to the sea—if, indeed, it does not yield up its life into some other cataract or more majestic river.

To-night its effect was mournful and desolate. In the growing dark, the surrounding solitude and gloom seemed portentous. The deep blackness of the pines was losing itself in the deeper blackness of night, but one felt that the melancholy trees were there, and their influence remained. The very rocks took weird shapes and forms ; and extending my walk for some short distance beyond the waterfall, a huge road-side stone so caught the outline of a crouching bear that for one moment I stood rooted to the spot in unpleasant doubt.

But if at any period of the world's history it had been endowed with life, all that had long since been petrified, perhaps by one of the good spirits haunting this region. The stone is still there, reader, beside the steep slope, under the shadow of the trees, guarding the way. It may probably see out this century and the next in its present position, and you may satisfy yourself as to the resemblance as you pass that way.

But it must be when the very last shades of twilight are expiring—as they were expiring on this occasion—or the charm will be broken, the spell will not work, the weird influence upon the mind will be wanting. For similar effects you must have similar causes ; and if a fair landscape is described to you, all balmy air, and golden suns and tropical flowers, and singing birds, and you visit that fair landscape in mid-winter, and find it all snow and east winds and leaden skies, do not therefore conclude that the former state of things never existed and will never return. The occasion, and not the writer, must be credited with the change.

For, poor frail mortals that we are, we cannot control our sunshine : cannot command a day or an hour, or be certain of a moment : cannot turn one hair white or black, or add one cubit to our stature. We have to take all things as we find them ; be thankful for our small mercies as well as our great ; hope for the best ; hope on, hope ever ; hold on our little way ; and trust that at the end of the long line of life there is a goal where all will be well ; the wrong become right, the crooked be made straight : a sunshine eternal, without fear of any cloud or stormy weather.

Groping up the zig-zag ladder as best the darkness allowed, I wended my way back to the settlement (I know no better name for it), whose lights, shining through the gloom, were the only beacon

wherewith to guide one's steps. There, in a room that had once been the refectory of the monks, or something of the kind (for this portion of the abbey had been adapted to modern purposes), supper was not only ready but nearly over. At least thirty people were seated at a long table, busy with their knives and forks—especially the knives. I had thought to be alone in this out-of-the-world spot, and behold a crowd. As usual where a number of Germans are assembled, conversation waxed animated and voices loud. The German women know little of that excellent thing in their sex, a sweet voice, and to a shrill treble the men chime in with a firm double bass. Singular that so musical a people should neglect a charm we prize so highly.

What spirits were abroad that night, hovering in the air, whispering in the rustling of the pines, the ceaseless murmur of the waterfall? Sleep brought no unconsciousness, no rest; it was haunted by dreams in which ghouls and goblins played a part, bears and wolves springing out from the depths of the forest, and it was a perpetual dance of death, as it were, to escape with life. All night long, even in sleep, the rush of the water never ceased; and when morning dawned upon another day I felt that I had verily and indeed been possessed by the unseen powers of the air. The spirits of the monks were at work. Perhaps those who had shirked their dull, dry routine of duties in life were performing penance. Never was there so uncanny a spot: never a place so thoroughly given up to witchcraft. And—strange, corroborative fact—later on, in comparing notes with fellow pilgrims, I found they had had identically the same experiences, were haunted by the same terrible dreams, went through the same terrific combats.


Yes, there was something mysterious and unearthly about Allerheiligen. Whether the inn had been built on consecrated ground, and the ghosts of the friars resented the desecration; whether it displeased them that a spot devoted to religious purposes for so many centuries should now be given up to the vulgar and secular uses of public entertainment; whether, in this out-of-the-world spot, sundry murders had been committed, and the victims, in unquiet resting places, were hovering about the world they had quitted too soon and tormenting mankind: this cannot be known. Certain it is, that I felt as if a month had passed away, battles and sieges and the crack of a hundred dooms, since the previous evening.

In the early morning I went for a long look at the ruins, so singular a sight in this remote quarter. There rose the crumbling walls that once had echoed with the mournful, monotonous Gregorian chants of the monks; there at the midnight mass in days gone by, the lighted windows must have gleamed weirdly amidst the impenetrable outside darkness; whilst within, those members of a most austere order performed their duties, some possibly nodding wearily, and doing penance next day for the weakness of the flesh. Here, in those grass-grown courts, age after age, century after century, the long, cold, gloomy

corridors must have echoed to the footsteps of the brethren, as they crept along in cowl and sandal, and, perhaps, like the monks of La Trappe, raised their eyes to each other's faces only to give additional force to the mournful "*memento mori*" of that order. All trace of the corridors had disappeared; the very ruin of much that had existed could no longer be seen; the monks and their order had passed into the land of shadows; but all surrounding nature, the running stream, the eternal, pine-clad hills remained the same. These change not.

I returned and found that everyone breakfasted in a sort of covered shed or open room attached to the main building. The morning was fresh and chilly; the ladies wore their bonnets, the gentlemen their hats. There was great bowing and scraping amongst them; endless ceremonies and inquiries as to how everyone had slept. All looked as if breakfast indoors in a sensible room with closed windows would have been much more agreeable. For the sun had not penetrated into the hollow; the gloom of the hills alone was enough to freeze one at this early hour; the rushing water, in fancy at any rate, chilled all the air. But the coffee, and the delicious honey that you find all over the Black Forest, and the hard-boiled eggs served out to everyone, a little modified this state of things, and put something of life and animation into the assembled groups.

Punctually at nine o'clock Jehu came round with the carriage. He, at any rate, looked neither goblin-haunted nor in any other way disturbed. The landlord closed the door, with a flourish; wished me a happy journey; made a deep obeisance as he begged the favour of recommendation. The coachman cracked his whip; the loiterers in the breakfast-room looked after the carriage, and—I hope—speeded the parting guest. We left the ruins, and the inn, and all the rest of it behind us, and went on our way rejoicing.



OUR AMATEUR CONCERT.

"FRANCES, my dear," said Mr. Smallwood to his wife, "there's terrible distress in the village still, I hear."

"Ah!" sighed the lady addressed, "I'm afraid so, John, indeed. Though if *every* one had given as much as we did, the Thursday Children's Dinners need not have fallen through, nor yet the Men's Sunday Breakfasts."

"I wish we could afford to give the Rector another fifty," continued Mr. Smallwood, "but I suppose that's out of the question. We've given all we can just now, and they say 'charity begins at home.'"

The gentleman quitted the room here, and his wife fell into a musing fit.

That evening, when dinner was over and Mr. and Mrs. Smallwood, a middle-aged couple "without encumbrance," as the advertisements say, sat in their drawing-room, amidst the numerous guests invited down to Smallwood Hall for the first few weeks of the New Year, the hostess electrified her company by a proposition, which, from her unusually thoughtful demeanour since the conversation reported above, had evidently been germinating in the worthy lady's mind for some hours.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," she began, from her easy chair, raising her closed fan to command attention and drawing the gaze of all the occupants of the room on her at once: "I have an appeal to make. The poor people of our village are suffering acutely in various ways, from the privations attendant on this continued hard weather. My husband and I have given all we can afford for their relief, and now I want to call upon *you* for *your* contributions."

She paused. Her guests *all* looked astonished. *Some* looked angry. Some simply avoided her eye. Some put their hands in their pockets at once.

With a smile she continued, "*Not* in money!"

Again a change came over the company. The hands moved away from the pockets. The eyes that had bent themselves to the ground were raised again in innocence and frankness. The mouths that had begun to droop, smiled.

"The contribution that I ask from you is Talent! Of the company now in this room, and staying in this house, almost every one possesses musical talent."

How funny some of the faces began to look now!

"The charming little musical evenings we enjoy in this drawing-room assure me that we have only to hire the Infants' School-room of

Dr. Blount ; draw out our programme ; fix the price of admission, and give a concert which will fill the coffers of the Relief Committee at once ! ”

The faces of the guests were no longer turned on their hostess. With one accord they turned to each other. Miss Fanny Markham, who sang the soprano of the duet “ False Vows,” instantly looked at her sister Annie, who sang the alto. Mr. Downs, the basso-profundo, looked at Mr. Wilson, the light tenor. Two gentlemen, who played the violin, exchanged glances of defiance; and little Sutton, who considered that Rubinstein wasn’t in it with him on the pianoforte, gazed with serene contempt through his double eye-glass on Fred Hardwicke, who dared to aspire to play the same instrument. Timid little Ella Dean, of whose piano playing even the great little Sutton had condescended to allow that it was “ not bad—for a young lady,” blushed up to the eyes and looked frightened to death at Mrs. Smallwood’s proposition. And others of the company received the idea in their own peculiar way, and finally it was adopted. Dr. Blount lent the school-room with joy, and promoted the sale of tickets and distribution of programmes far and wide.

And now that our amateurs found themselves actually let in for public performance, and saw their names, which had hitherto slumbered in the safe obscurity of home, billed about the little town of Crickley, in letters an inch high, they wore faces of gloomy importance indeed ; and the walls of Smallwood Hall echoed through the long hours of the day with practice dire and dread.

From the recesses of my own room, whither I was fain to retire sometimes, my ear was constantly greeted with far-off thundering exercises and fantasias—with hoarse shoutings in the bass clef, and distant wailings, moanings, and shriekings in the tenor, alto, and soprano dittos. Just as I would be congratulating myself on being sufficiently far removed from the noise to bear it pretty equably, to my horror a sudden sharp wail in the room adjoining would inform me that one of the violinists had come up to practise.

I am ashamed to describe myself as a young man who plays no instrument, neither possesses a voice, except for the ordinary work-a-day purposes of speaking, laughing, or, when occasion demands it, shouting. I feel myself, in consequence, a strange and almost anomalous being in this age, when everyone, down to the very lackeys, is proficient on some instrument, and many on two or three.

Of course, then, I was a mere myth among all these hard-working musicians. If I happened to be in the drawing-room when any piece or song was tried to test the improvement made in it by that day’s practice, and ventured to say I thought “ it went splendidly,” my approbation would be heard with perfect apathy ; while, were another performer by, his or her opinion would be anxiously solicited, and, even if “ damning with faint praise,” would be received with grateful delight.

Trouble soon arose, I regret to say, to mar the pleasure of good Mrs. Smallwood in her project. The programme was being drawn out one afternoon by a committee of the artistes, led, of course, by little Sutton, eye-glasses and all—and witnessed with much interest by our host and hostess and all the rest of the house party. "Now," cried Mrs. Smallwood, who, though no performer, superintended the general arrangements with great zest, and had, moreover, sufficient musical taste and knowledge to make valuable suggestions; "Now, Edward, read us the programme *so far*!"

Little Sutton, the "Edward" addressed, complied and started off. "First Part opens with glee, 'The Matadores!' the Misses Markham, Mr. Wilson, and Mr. Downs." Fanny and Annie blushed and smiled at each other. "Pianoforte Solo," went on the reader, "(a) Chromatic Fugue, Bach; (b) Demon Dance, Liszt, Mr. E. Sutton."

He coloured slightly, raised his eyebrows, settled his glasses anew, darted a complex sort of look at the unconscious Fred Hardwicke, and continued.

"Song, 'The Ruffian,' Mr. Downs; Ballad, 'The Fairy's Home,' Miss Fanny Markham; Pianoforte Solo, Variations on the well-known air 'Robin Adair,' Thalberg, Miss Ella Dean."

"I shall never be able to do it!" cried poor Ella, and then grew scarlet at her hardihood in making the statement. Sutton looked in pitying kindness.

"Oh yes, you will, Miss Ella," he said, consolingly. "You mustn't be frightened." Then he resumed his reading.

"Duet, 'False Vows,' the Misses Fanny and Annie Markham; Song, 'Oh! Star of Night,' Mr. Wilson; Pianoforte Solo"—the little stuck-up beggar paused, and I fancied I detected a sneer as he announced "Adagio and Rondo, from Sonata in A flat, Beethoven, Mr. Fred Hardwicke." Fred, however, noticed nothing. "Duet (Vocal), 'Your Money or Your Life!'" Mr. Downs and Mr. Wilson."

Mrs. Smallwood here interrupted. "I think, Edward" (Sutton was a sort of distant relative), "it would be a great addition to the programme if you and Mr. Hardwicke could give us a pianoforte duet."

Little Sutton said nothing, but Fred, who is rather a good-natured fellow, cried out, "All right, Mrs. Smallwood, I've no objection. We might get up 'The Thunderstorm Galop!'" turning to Sutton. "We'll settle who's to have treble and who bass by-and-by," continued Fred. Sutton coloured angrily, as if he thought there should be no question of that.

And now a diversion occurred. Old Mr. Biddlecombe (Mrs. Smallwood's uncle—a rich stock broker) had been listening with an expression of absorbed interest up to now; and when he heard this proposition to introduce a new item, in the shape of a pianoforte duet, into the programme, he seemed to pluck up courage to say

what had been in his head, for he suddenly called out, "And you may put down some *more* fresh things, Edward! A couple of songs from me—one in each part!"

"You, uncle!" exclaimed Mrs. Smallwood. "You!"

"Yes! me!" retorted the old gentleman, getting red in the face. "Why should you show so much surprise?"

"Because—because," faltered Mrs. Smallwood, "I should have thought you would not care about appearing on a platform." She would have added "because you can't sing," had she dared.

Mr. Biddlecombe stopped her. "No, no, my dear, I shan't mind it for once, especially as it's for charity. In fact, I shall rather enjoy it. I'll show them how songs were sung fifty years ago, when I was a lad. Put me down for 'Swabbing the Deck, Mates,' and 'Here's to Davy Jones.' I'll send for the songs by this afternoon's post." And to prevent further opposition, he waddled out of the room.

Edward Sutton looked perplexed, and glanced at Mrs. Smallwood for counsel. That lady was gazing thoughtfully down at her own hands. Then she looked up and shed a resigned smile round on us all. "It is unfortunate that my uncle should have taken this determination," she said, "but as he has, we must make the best of it. His singing, I am afraid, is not up to concert mark."

Edward Sutton threw back his head and laughed out. Some of the others looked as if they would have liked to do the same, but not having the privilege of relationship went no further. The conclave broke up soon after; for the programme was not prepared beyond the end of the first part.

That evening Edward Sutton and Fred Hardwicke began to practise "The Thunderstorm—Galop di Bravura." Sutton took the treble as a matter of course.

"Oh! I'm to have the bass, am I?" cried Fred, with a laugh.

"You can have this part—if *you want it!*" said his colleague, looking confused, and speaking frigidly.

"Oh! I don't say I want it," was Fred's careless rejoinder. "I think the best player ought to have it—whichever of us that is."

"Well—I—I opine that *I* am the better player of the two," little Sutton managed to get out, his very forehead crimsoning with the effort of saying it, and the determination not to be "sat upon."

"So I should imagine you opined," replied Fred, "and perhaps *I* opine the same thing regarding myself. But neither you nor I should take it on ourselves to judge who's fitted best for the parts. We'll put it to a committee of the house."

All the company in the drawing-room accordingly were called upon to decide this knotty point, and no doubt the debating and discussing would have gone on till now had not some one, with a more fertile imagination than the rest, suggested, "Let them draw lots!" The lots were prepared, adjusted, and shaken full five minutes in one of

Mrs. Smallwood's Dresden vases ; then they drew, and to my great gratification Fred drew treble, and Sutton bass. The latter flounced on to the other music-chair with a very sour visage. "You'll have to alter the variation on page two," he snarled. "You haven't the octave play to do it as it's written."

Fred laughed, and they began to read the piece together. Presently a pause in the music. They had begun to quarrel over the pedals. "*I shall take both pedals,*" Sutton was saying, "and use them at my own discretion."

"*That* you certainly won't!" retorted Fred Hardwicke. "D'you think I'm going to let anyone pedal for me? It would take all the spirit out of my playing!"

"*I shall have the pedals!*" repeated little Sutton, doggedly, looking straight before him. "You *must* know that the pedals ought to be managed by the ——"

"Better player," interrupted Fred, "so I shall have them."

Sutton laughed scornfully, and a grinding of feet followed, each trying to turn the other off the coveted pedal.

"Pray Edward! Pray Mr. Hardwicke!" cried poor Mrs. Smallwood, at her wits' end for fear the quarrelsome musicians should fall out so far as to give up the duet altogether. "Pray settle this little matter amicably. Let the one who has 'pedal' marked use it for himself, and the other the same." Ashamed to continue their wrangling further, the matter was left in the way suggested by our hostess.

Old Mr. Biddlecombe's songs arrived in due course, and he began to practise them ; adding another, and, I am bound to say, a most terrible and indefatigable one, to the howling fraternity, who "made night (and day) hideous" at Smallwood Hall. I was beginning to think I would try to get my visit over, the practising was so distracting, and all companionship for walks, drives, and rides was gone.

The desire to hear how our amateur friends comported themselves in public overcame this petulant resolution, however, and I stayed on at the Hall. Ella Dean grew dreadfully nervous as the 20th approached, and when Dr. Blount assured Mrs. Smallwood that the room would be positively packed, he knew for certain, I saw poor little Ella turn as pale as death. I trembled for her success. She is but seventeen, and shy and childish for that even. The child practised more incessantly than any of them, getting up, I heard, at day-break for the purpose. She was ambitious to do well.

At last—at last—the 20th arrived! At breakfast that morning most of the performers looked anxious and pale. Mrs. Smallwood looked smilingly round at the assembled "troupe" as she poured out coffee, but I think her smile covered secret misgivings.

Old Biddlecombe yelled his two dreadful songs the whole morning, and then went up to his room to rest, and drink some compound he had made for his voice. Most of the performers took a holiday from practice. Fred Hardwicke was an exception, and little Ella Dean

dashed through her solo in a frenzied fashion that augured ill for her later and more risky performance.

After luncheon we went for a stroll en masse, looking quite a large party. The Misses Markham were my companions, and as they are extremely pleasant and lady-like girls, I enjoyed my walk very much. So, I think, did they. Anyhow, we laughed a good deal. Home again at five. Tea with the ladies in the dusk drawing-room. An interval of welcome laziness and lounging. Then dinner, for which undress was allowed, as the performers preferred getting into their "war-paint" afterwards.

The concert was fixed for eight o'clock, and at a quarter past seven the drawing-room at Smallwood Hall presented a brilliant scene of gorgeous toilettes. Trains rustled, shirt-studs twinkled, gloves were drawn on, and their many buttons manipulated by nervous fingers; music was rolled hastily into cases. Each fresh arrival from up-stairs increased the powerful odour of y-lang y-lang, and new mown hay, which struggled with the scent of hot-house flowers. At last we all set out in various vehicles, and, after a quarter of an hour's drive, reached the school-room adjoining Crickley parish church. A side-door took the whole of the Smallwood Hall party into the small room which had been improvised into an ante-room for the occasion, and from the door of which we could see the audience pouring rapidly into the concert hall. The latter place was already half-full, for Mrs. Smallwood was very well-known and much liked in the neighbourhood, and had not scrupled to make full use of her popularity in inducing her neighbours to come to the concert she had promoted with such charitable views.

The sight of all the faces in rows half down the room completely scared some of our performers, and even Fred Hardwicke was heard to mutter, as he peeped from the ante-room door, "Hope I shan't make a fool of myself before all these people!" As for Ella Dean, she was so white and trembling that I observed to Mrs. Smallwood, "It would be almost better to substitute something else for her solo."

Mrs. Smallwood accordingly said to her, in a low tone, "Ella, dear, we'll have an apology made, and you shall be excused."

This, however, Ella was ashamed to have done. "Mr. Sutton says I shall not feel so bad when I'm once at the instrument," she said; "and it would be so silly to be the only one to show the white feather!"

There was the secret of Ella's determination to go on with it. No one else had seceded. The little creature had plenty of pride evidently. Would she had had more nerve!

Mrs. Smallwood of course wished to hear her concert "from the front;" so, after staying in the artistes' room till it wanted but a minute or two to eight, she took her husband's arm and adjourned to the concert hall, followed by those of her guests who were to play nothing but the part of listeners.

We left a somewhat dispiriting scene behind us. The Misses Markham were clearing their throats every minute, and looking feverishly over the glee that opened the programme, whispering now and then to each other, as they pointed out different parts of it, "I hope I shan't go flat *there*;" "I'm certain I shall crack on that F sharp," or "When I break down *here* you must just go on without me, dear." Ella Dean was looking fixedly into space, her brows slightly contracted, her breathing hurried, a copy of her piece on her lap, and her cold, ungloved hands reposing on it. The violinists were tuning up their instruments and maintaining a rather disconnected conversation, interspersed with somewhat gasping laughs. Mr. Downs and Mr. Wilson stood with folded arms and closed lips, apparently solving some knotty mathematical problems in their heads. Fred Hardwicke could not forbear some jokes at the expense of his fellow-performers, but he owned to being in a "confounded funk" himself. Little Sutton, who had superintended the preparation and decoration of the concert room and the getting in of the piano, a huge "grand" from Binchester, was full of importance. His colour was higher than usual, his manner was very civil, his little feet kept tripping to the door of the ante-room and back to report how the hall was filling; and altogether I was gratified to note that he, too, was nervous.

Old Biddlecombe was the only one of the party who seemed at his ease. There he stood, dressed out to perform, a diamond twinkling in his shirt-front, his white gloves clasped behind him, his face redder than ever, and his figure looking a vast deal too pronounced for the platform. Mrs. Smallwood gave him a thoughtful glance as she prepared to go away, and I heard her say to her husband, as they walked before me, "I wish I could have persuaded uncle not to sing!"

Settled in the front row of the reserved seats, I took a survey of the room. Decorations on a grand scale. About two dozen evergreens, in pots, grouped lavishly round the foot of the platform. Names of six composers illuminated in blue and crimson letters on white paper tablets, and stuck at intervals on the wall above the platform—Beethoven, with three dead bay-leaves curling over the top of him; Thalberg and Liszt, each adorned with a couple of holly-berries; Gounod, Blumenthal, and Dibdin left plain.

Having somewhat recovered from the effect of this overwhelming display, I found leisure to recognise round me several faces I had seen at church and met at neighbouring houses during my stay at Smallwood Hall. Mr. and Mrs. Smallwood were greeted with countless "How d'ye do's," taps on the shoulder, and inquiries from the numerous friends seated near them. I looked at my watch. Five minutes past eight. A storm of applause from the expectant audience was a gentle hint that it was time to begin. I glanced at the ante-room door, and saw Sutton's face withdrawn rapidly from the aperture. I could not forbear a smile and a selfish thanksgiving that I was not

one of the doomed creatures who figured on the programme. In another moment up came Mr. Downs leading Miss Fanny Markham, and up came Mr. Wilson leading Miss Annie. Little Sutton tripped lightly after them, and glided to the instrument to accompany. Enthusiastic marks of approval burst from the audience.

It was easy enough to come up, but not so easy, it seemed, to arrange themselves. Our glee-singers were evidently on a platform for the first time in their lives. On coming up the two gentlemen stood in the middle, with a lady on each outside. This seemed to strike them as wrong. The gentlemen stepped back to allow the ladies to pass into the centre position. The ladies, not understanding their intention, stepped back also. They collided. An audible titter ran through the audience, though they kept on clapping. Mrs. Smallwood looked hard at her programme, and bit her lip. An agreeable but somewhat puzzling little episode ensued among our friends on the platform. With crimson-faces, and a pained expression on the same, they seemed bent on performing a scrap out of a quadrille. The scared faces of the two violinists were plainly visible peering from the artistes' room. At last, with a desperate plunge, the unlucky four advanced to the front, the two girls in the middle and the gentlemen outside. The clapping continued. "Bow! bow!" Sutton had been muttering ever since taking his place at the instrument. Fanny Markham heard it at length, and straightway performed a spasmodic, apologetic obeisance. Her colleagues caught it as if it had been a yawn, and followed her example, hurriedly and not too gracefully. Then began a mighty rustling and turning over of music, and a furtive comparing of divers passages, together with an exchange of frightened, beseeching glances between the glee-singers. Mr. Downs dropped his copy and picked it up again. The clapping ceased. A feeble prelude trickled over the keys of the concert grand, and the glee commenced.

I do not know if my reader is acquainted with the glee entitled "The Matadores." It is not a bad one in its way, and possesses the desideratum (with *some* persons) that a vast amount of noise *can* be got out of it. The bass voice has, among other trifling duties, to imitate the bellowing of a bull—matadores, I believe, have some mysterious connection with those animals. Mr. Downs had been wont to do this part rather well. But, alas! to-night he began the bellowing of the musical beast much too soon; found out his error; ceased; forgot when it ought to come in; completely lost his head; and did nothing but give a series of feeble, experimental bellows, at intervals of five or six bars, throughout the whole of the first part of the composition. Fanny Markham was a semi-tone flat, and her sister about the same interval sharp. Wilson cracked on all his high notes—so the effect was altogether pleasing.

When they reached the end of the first part Fanny and Annie looked unutterable things at each other, and the two men stared hard

at their music. The second part went better ; the bellowing came in all right, and, being sung with double force, proved a set-off against the previous failure.

A hearty burst of applause greeted the four as they filed cheerfully off, followed by little Sutton. Mrs. Smallwood breathed more freely. "Now," she murmured, "things will go better ; the ice is broken."

True, Mrs. Smallwood ! the ice is broken ! Let us hope none of our performers will fall into the hole !

Sutton was the next on the list. His "Demon Dance" was a discordant thing enough, even at Smallwood Hall, but *now* ! I don't believe even *demons* could have danced to it, such a wild scramble did it prove. It contained, moreover, many and many a discord, of which I am certain the learned Abbé who wrote it was quite innocent. There was a pause, too, in one place, that I never remember noticing before. He managed to get through it, however, and went off hastily ; and, I saw not on very good terms with himself.

Then came "The Fairy's Home." Miss Fanny Markham was not to be congratulated on her rendering of this ballad. She opened her lips with the best of intentions, but only a faint, whispering gasp represented the "Fairy's" trills, turns, and bravura passages. The audience, who had not attained the pitch of musical refinement referred to above, were evidently relieved when the Fairy finished her somewhat lengthy description of her residence "in the woodland green and the dells and vales," and was conducted out of their sight.

"Now," thought I, "poor Ella must come under fire !" I was really anxious and sympathetic about this poor child, for not only had she a pretty, modest face and manner, but I admired the pluck which made her persevere in her determination to play. They led her up. She was as colourless as her white frock, and had far too many other matters to think about, to dream of bowing to the room. "Poor child !" whispered a lady in the row behind ; "it is cruel to make her play. She looks fit to faint !"

Ella was taken to the piano. Before she had well sat down she had dashed into her piece. Oh ! so fast ! Oh ! so frenzied ! The loud pedal pressed down by her nervous little foot the whole time. Scramble ! Scramble ! Dash ! Dash ! My teeth are set, and I feel my face flush, as I watch her pained, frowning countenance, across which a sharp spasm shoots when some more than usually shocking chord is struck. She has got to the foot of the first page, and things grow worse instead of better. Her face is deathly white. A variation begins. Off goes the right hand with a run. The left tries to follow—the run has broken down ! Hurriedly she attempts it again ; faster this time. It has broken down again—in an earlier stage ! She looks wildly at the audience, more wildly at the gentleman who is "turning" for her, dashes both her hands down on an excruciating

chord, and then, rising from her seat, she puts her fingers in her ears, and darts from the platform !

I never could make out why she put her fingers in her ears, unless to shut out imaginary hisses. Certain it is she had no real ones to fear. The audience tried to coax her back by hearty and prolonged applause. But on Mrs. Smallwood hurrying into the ante-room, poor Ella was found dissolved in tears, so there was an end of *her* performances for the evening. Old Biddlecombe was the next performer, and he certainly did not lack nerve, if he *did* lack musical ability. There the old gentleman stood, bowing away and smiling in response to the clapping of hands that greeted such a remarkable figure. It was a comic song he sang ; but, through the first verse, either from the broker's indistinct articulation, or natural obtuseness on the part of his audience, it was listened to as solemnly as if it had been a recitative from one of the oratorios. At the end of the first verse, therefore, he signed to Hardwicke, who was accompanying him, to stop for a moment, and broke out with, "Ladies and gentlemen, I beg to inform you that this is a *comic* song ! You did not seem aware of the fact, or perhaps you were afraid I might not like too much laughter. Don't be frightened of that ! If you laugh all through it, I shan't be offended !"

Mrs. Smallwood turned scarlet, and read her programme with deep interest ; the good lady was terribly ashamed of her irrepressible relative, and the audience, complying with his request full early, broke at once into loud laughter, which lasted through the rest of the song, and was doubtless more at the singer than what he sang. For, what with his speech, his appearance, and the antiquated, over-done "comedy business" he introduced as the song progressed, it was a difficult matter to keep one's cachinnations within reasonable bounds, and the old fellow ended in a roar that might have been heard a mile off. He went away beaming and triumphant to receive the congratulations of the poor souls in the ante-room.

Then came forward Mr. Wells and his violin. It was unfortunate for this gentleman that he came before an audience worked into a laughing humour, and that he had a trick of making what the children call "faces" as he played. At each fresh bar Mr. Wells performed some new and weird grimace, and as regularly did a low murmur of merriment undulate through the room. At last, becoming aware of this, when not quite half-way through his solo, poor Mr. Wells stopped in a flurry, glanced nervously downwards to see if in his pre-occupation he had put on any unusual article of dress, looked at the audience, colouring painfully, tried to resume his playing, failed, tried again, grew very white, bowed low, and scuttled off the platform, whither no amount of cheering and encouragement could entice him back.

Fred Hardwicke's sonata followed, and went in first-rate style. Fred vanished after it, amid the bravos from all parts, and I smiled to think of what must be Sutton's feelings.

The next item was "The Thunderstorm — Galop di Bravura." "Here comes a treat," said I, for I admired the duet greatly.

The two young men ascended the platform. Fred having established himself a favourite, was greeted with quite a "reception." Sutton looked awfully jealous—indeed, downright savage. They took their seats, and I saw that odious little Sutton squaring his elbows and taking up quite three-quarters of the key-board. There was an audible scuffling of feet too in the vicinity of the pedals, so *that* battle was evidently being fought over afresh. Presently they started, after fierce whispers and glaring on the part of the bass performer. Fred had a perceptible smile playing about his face. "The Thunderstorm" raged on furiously for several pages, and Fred was doing wonders in the treble in imitation of the lightning and hail, when the scuffling of feet began again worse than ever—and presently Sutton suddenly ceased playing, and, scarlet in the face, turned upon Fred. "I tell you I *will* have the pedals when I want them!" he screamed; "you *shan't* bully me like this!"

Fred, taken by surprise, left off playing too, and a loud laugh broke from the audience. I have not the least doubt that the little creature did this out of jealousy, to spoil the effect of the duet, in which Hardwicke was playing brilliantly. And he certainly succeeded; for the break marred the whole thing, and when they *did* take it up again Fred's playing was not so good as it had been.

This ended the first part of the concert. The second part, I rejoice to say, was decidedly better; for the performers, though still doing some queer things, were more at their ease. At eleven o'clock it was over, and the audience was set free. I heard one lady say to her friend as she went out, "It's been as good as the theatre. I've seen few comedies that have made me laugh so much!" And this, I believe, was the general opinion in the neighbourhood regarding Mrs. Smallwood's concert. In one respect it succeeded. A good deal of money was made and handed over to Dr. Blount for the poor, resulting in blankets, coal and soup.

Edward Sutton went back to town next day, with a carpet-bag in his hand, and a hideous scowl on his face. Hardwicke tells me that he has since been cut dead in London by the jealous little mortal. Ella Dean was ill with nervous headache for nearly a week after the terrible night. The Misses Markham managed to survive, with health and tempers unimpaired; but whenever I mention our amateur concert to them they are sure to look at each other with large, horrified eyes, and say, in a tone of deep feeling, "Oh! wasn't it *awful*!"

Mrs. Smallwood has decided never to get up another amateur concert. "After all," she says, musingly, "professionals do that kind of thing best!"

THE LAST ELM OF THE AVENUE.

A PITCH-DARK night, rain falling in torrents, wind blowing gustily from every point of the compass at once. Two or three oil lamps flickered feebly in the gloom on a struggling crowd of damp passengers, a chaotic mass of luggage, and—no porters.

Such were my earliest impressions on being turned out of the London down train at Westwood, the station for Cinqhaven, whither I and some half-dozen other officers were bound, to complete our education by a course of musketry instruction.

"Where's Cinqhaven?" was my first very natural inquiry. "And how am I to get there?"

Cinqhaven was "across there," a civil official replied, pointing over an expanse of ploughed field in the direction of the South Pole. The one omnibus had, it appeared, departed with a small selection from the impatient crowd of belated travellers, but would be back again directly.

"How soon?" I asked.

"Well, in about an hour or so."

I thanked him, committed my belongings to his care, and with a benediction on my luck and the colonel who had sent me there, plunged out into the night.

Outside the station I found an officer with his party, a sergeant and some privates, about to march to Cinqhaven: and gladly joined them.

I took for granted some one knew the way. I didn't. Such a night! Rain pelting us viciously, wind blowing our fragmentary attempts at conversation away into space. Finally, at a point where five roads met, and the wind and rain did their wickedest, we halted. Fire and candle-light streamed invitingly out of the unshuttered window of a low, white house; a sign creaked over our heads in the darkness, and, after brief debate, in we all turned to the cozy kitchen of the Green Lion.

We were not unwilling to accept the landlady's assurances that the storm would "blow itself out" in half an hour or less. She invited us into her own snug parlour, and here, for the first time, I got a good look at my companion.

He was a tall, handsome fellow, with dark complexion, and curiously light eager eyes; by name, I discovered, Captain Angus MacLeish, of the 34th (Royal Cromarty) Highlanders. (Here I may introduce myself to my readers: Lieutenant Jones, Royal North Wales Militia.) Captain MacLeish was rather stiff and high and mighty at first, I thought—very much the Highland chieftain. "Caolchairn," or some such pretty name, was, I found, his correct designation. Still, I let

him see that I considered a Jones of Prybwlych the equal of any man in Her Majesty's service, and we gradually warmed into sociability over the landlady's blazing fire, and such refreshment as the Green Lion afforded.

The landlady's prediction was verified in less than the time mentioned. The storm blew over, the clouds parted, and a clear white moon shone out.

Half an hour's quick walking brought us to the top of the hill, under which lay the little town of Cinquhaven. Its red roofs looked pretty and picturesque in the moonlight beyond, and to westward the sea and the marshes stretching away grey and mysterious; below us a row of lighted windows showed where the barracks stood.

"That's a welcome sight," said MacLeish.

"Were you ever here before?" I asked.

"Never. I only heard of the place last week—ah!"—he stopped short.

I looked round in amazement. He was standing upright and rigid, his eyes fixed on some point in the road before us, his forefinger extended.

"Why, what's the matter?" I asked, looking down the road—white and lonely—and seeing only a milestone standing out distinctly from the dark hedge.

"*There!*" His eyes dilated with a fixed stare of horror, his breath came short and quick, and at last, with a sharp cry, he swayed forward and fell insensible on the path. I thought he tried to say something, but failed to understand him. The soldiers had halted, and two came rushing up vociferating wildly in some unknown tongue. They knelt beside him and raised him, all stark and white, in the moonshine. I gave a few directions, to which they vouchsafed not the smallest attention; but somehow they contrived to support him between them, and we proceeded to the barracks; no great distance, fortunately.

I questioned the sergeant, who had looked on meanwhile with undisturbed composure. He declined to commit himself to any opinion whatever. The privates were "Caolchairn's" own people, puir ignorant Hieland bodies, who could hardly speak English. Could *he* understand Gaelic? Weel, a word, or may be twa. What had Captain MacLeish said as he fell? It sounded like "into my grave," but he culdna be positeeve. And here Sergeant Tulloch's communications came to an abrupt stop, and I could only extract, in addition, that the Highlanders knew best what to do with their chief, and that "he'd be a' right the morn."

So he was. He appeared on parade right enough. I found that he and I were in the same section; also that, of all the sixty officers composing the "course," he was the only one with whom I had the slightest acquaintance. He was in the same position, I fancy—so we fraternized to a certain extent—walked over to Boatstown together—

the popular amusement of the period, and worked at the red book in company. He was an odd young fellow, as starchily repellent as a Spanish Don one moment, and the next boyishly expansive and communicative. I think he was really desperately shy—the result of home-breeding. He gave me a description of his Highland home one day, with its mountain and moor, loch and forest, where the MacLeishs lived in feudal state, naught appertaining to true dignity of a real Highland chieftain being lacking, from the pipers to the deadly feud. The MacLeishs of Caolchairn, and the MacLeishs of Tuchoran had killed, burned, betrayed, massacred and generally made themselves mutually unpleasant from time immemorial. The two branches of this amiable family sprang from twin brothers, and, according to tradition, were to carry on the same bloodthirsty relations till they became simultaneously extinct.

"And may I ask how you and the representative of the other line conduct yourselves when you happen to meet in society now-a-days?" I inquired. MacLeish laughed.

"We *don't* meet. Tuchoran was sold generations ago and the MacLeish of that date died abroad. We have often tried to trace out his descendants, but with only partial success. Perhaps it's as well," he continued with an embarrassed laugh, "for they say that though we don't slay and plunder now-a-days, the—the curse is on us yet. When one of each line shall meet, there follows calamity."

I looked as profoundly impressed as he could desire.

"Ten years ago a clergyman in the South—chaplain to a hospital—wrote to my father to say his cousin, Fergus MacLeish, lay dying—mortally injured in some discreditable brawl. My father, good man, started at once. He was in time to see the dying man and to promise to befriend his only son—a boy of about fourteen. Fergus MacLeish died with his hand clasped in my father's. It was their first and last meeting."

"Well! No harm came of it, I suppose."

"My father never saw his home again. He was killed in the great railway accident on the Great Northern."

"What became of the boy?" I asked presently.

"Young Fergus? He was an utter good-for-nothing. My mother gave the chaplain carte blanche, and he did his utmost to reclaim him. It was no use. He was in and out of prison half-a-dozen times, and at last we shipped him off to the Colonies—but I'm almost sure I met him last year at the Derby."

"How did you know him?"

"By his likeness to myself. It's curiously strong. Also by another mark—a cut on one eyelid—that gives him a most sinister look. The chaplain mentioned it to me."

"Did anything happen?" I could not resist asking. MacLeish's face grew dark.

"Don't ask me—enough to ruin my life, and make it little worth having from henceforward. Hullo! It's seven o'clock. Do you dine at mess to-night?" and he left me to dress.

Still I got no nearer to any explanation of the occurrence on the first night of our meeting. He always avoided the Westwood road I noticed, and another peculiar fact which struck me was the way in which his servant Alistor—his foster-brother he told me—kept us constantly in sight. It was as if he expected me to do his master a mischief. Wherever we went Alistor's red head and foxy eyes appeared at unexpected moments. One day MacLeish came into my room in great distress. An accident had happened in the town—a scaffold had fallen, and Alistor, who was passing at the moment, had been knocked down and injured—some iron-work had struck his head, and it was feared had destroyed the sight of one eye.

"He must go up to town as soon as he can travel. Everything that the best man there can do for him shall be done. I'll trust him to no one here. My poor Alistor!"

I was able to assist in making arrangements for his stay in town, and both master and man were inordinately grateful.

I went with MacLeish to see him off at Westwood. There had been an agonizing scene when he heard that the oculist would require him to be at least a month under treatment. He refused to go—wept, expostulated, implored MacLeish on his knees not to send him away—at least, so I guessed, for the conversation was carried on in Gaelic. MacLeish promised to go up and see him every week—argued, coaxed, jested, and at last ordered him sternly to be silent and obey, and the poor fellow submitted. Tears were in his one visible eye when we said good-bye at the station, and he poured out what seemed to be a flood of impassioned warning. MacLeish answered good-humouredly, saying in English, "You will find me safe enough, you foolish fellow. Don't you think Mr. Jones here can take as good care of me as you?" Alistor turned suddenly upon me, scanning my face with his sharp eye.

"Are you in truth his faithful friend?"

I was too amazed to reply.

"Let all who wish well to Caolchairn stand by him now, *for his dark hour is at hand.*"

MacLeish hurried him into the train and I saw no more of him.

We walked back together down the memorable Westwood road.

"Can you guess what he means?" asked MacLeish, after long silence.

"Not in the least," I replied.

"Do you remember the night we came?"

"Perfectly," I answered. We turned a corner as I spoke, and the broad white road to Cinquhaven sloped down the hill at our feet—with the milestone standing out white and distinct against the dark hedge. MacLeish stopped.

"There, by that stone, on that night, stood Fergus MacLeish. I saw him as clearly as I see you now. He held out his hand, and said, 'Welcome! we are waiting for you, Caolchairn.' His face was clear in the moonlight. It was the face of a *dead man*."

"I don't believe a word of it," I said energetically, to assure myself I was not frightened.

"Do as you please," said MacLeish coldly.

"It was evident," I reasoned, taking counsel with myself, "that poor MacLeish's brain had become diseased; living all his life in a bogie-ridden Highland stronghold, in an atmosphere of Gaelic superstition. He would be better without Alistor hovering about him and ministering to his fancies, and I must do my best to drag him into society. He certainly hates the sight of his fellow-creatures as much as any man I know." Accordingly, next day, instead of our usual secluded seat on the shingle, by a deserted Martello tower, I suggested that we should take our books to the Parade, studying in public being a Cinquaven fashion.

"Where's the Parade? I've never seen it yet," he remarked. I marched him eastwards forthwith. It was half-past twelve on a bright autumn morning, the sun was shining, the sea dancing, beves of pretty children frolicking on the shingle, and three of the prettiest girls in Cinquaven taking a brisk turn after bathing. The *very* prettiest bowed to me, and looked as if we *might* come and talk to her if we liked; but all that MacLeish said was: "It was a bad place for working, and that he wanted to go to the town and buy some red ink!"

"This way," I said. "You don't mean to say you've not been down the Lady's Avenue?"

We turned through a gate into the cool shade of some pollard elms that made a bowery walk across some low-lying meadows to the town. "Some dead-and-gone county lady—bless her considerate soul—planted this grove and bequeathed it to the town. It's the prettiest thing in Cinquaven."

"The town doesn't seem to appreciate it," said MacLeish. "It has been let go to the bad. These trees want thinning and some young ones planting in those gaps——"

"The Mayor and Corporation *are* awaking to a sense of their duties, I see," I said presently. "They are actually breaking up the ground and getting fresh earth in. I suppose it's twenty years since it was last done—and it will be twenty more before it's done again."

MacLeish did not answer; he seized my arm suddenly and pointed with outstretched finger to the last elm of the avenue.

"There!" he gasped; "he is there *again*!"

I saw nothing but two wheelbarrows, a plank, and two spades sticking upright in the newly-broken earth.

"Hold up!" I said. "Don't faint *here*, for Heaven's sake!" and

I shook him roughly. He looked at me vacantly, and I hurried him on. Presently he passed his hand across his eyes and drew a deep breath.

"My grave—or *his*?" he muttered.

He said no more till we reached the barracks, when he turned to me quite calmly and collectedly. "Laugh as you will—it can do no harm. I have seen *him* again. The third time will be the last." And he closed his door gently upon me.

I hadn't a chance of making many friends amongst the Cinquaven residents, sociable and agreeable as they were, and was pleasantly surprised to meet some Welsh friends, established in one of the Parade houses for the season. They were a gay, hospitable set, with half a dozen pretty daughters, and as many sons, all holiday-making as hard as they could. Something was always going on at the Pryse-Davieses, and I and many of my friends were made cordially welcome at any time. I conveyed numerous invitations to MacLeish—all politely but firmly declined. A pic-nic to Eastcliff Bay—a boating-party up the river to Lynas Castle—an afternoon dance: finally a seat on the drag to Northwold races.

On our return from our walk up the Avenue, I found yet another of Miss Winnie Pryse-Davies's pretty little notes lying on my table, and a second addressed to Captain A. MacLeish.

"A dance, after the races! Bless the girls, what constitutions they have! Is it worth while bothering MacLeish to go, I wonder? What can make them so crazy to cultivate his acquaintance?"

I gave no encouragement to Miss Winnie's hopes of his acceptance when I met her on the Parade that evening.

"Such a *shame*!" she said. "We want you all to come in uniform. It will make the room look so much better. *Yours* is lovely, I know—but a *Highland* dress!"

"Well, there are some 93rd men here. Shall I bring *them*?"

"Oh, as many as you can, by all means, but I had set my heart on your Highland chief." Here three more Miss Pryse-Davieses hurried up excitedly and delightedly. "He's *coming*, Winnie! Here's his note!"

I could hardly believe my eyes.

"Why not?" said MacLeish to me that night. "I've been very ungracious to your kind friends. Let me off the races, and I'll be as civil as you please all the evening. Next Friday, is it? Well, I hope they won't make a late affair of it. I'm going to shoot in the match on Saturday."

So it befel that on Friday evening a resplendent figure presented itself in my room. Caolchairn in full war paint.

"Why, you are as bejewelled as an old dowager going to Court," said I, gazing on him with respectful admiration. "You'd be worth something if you were melted down!"

MacLeish laughed merrily. He was in high spirits, as excited as any school-girl at the prospect of a dance: asked me no end of questions about the Miss Pryse-Davieses, and made me solemnly promise him introductions to all of them.

"By the way, I ought to have some money with me," I said, as we passed through the barrack gate. "We may want a cab home."

"Nonsense; it's a splendid night; besides, I've plenty." And he drew out his purse as he stood under the lamp. "No, it's all gold; what a nuisance!"

I noticed a pair of hungry eyes gleaming out of the darkness as he poured the money back, and saw a ragamuffin figure move slowly off. "Lucky there are two of us," I thought.

It was a brilliant little dance. The rooms were prettily and gaily decorated, the local confectioner had surpassed himself in the supper, and the Pryse-Davies girls looked as fresh and bright as if they had not passed a whole day under a broiling sun on the racecourse.

"Is this wise?" I asked Miss Winnie, as we stood in the open French window of the dining-room, that looked on to the Parade.

"What! the open air? Oh, it never does me any harm; and the moon is rising so exquisitely."

"I didn't mean that exactly, but is it safe to leave these windows open? Look at the mob out there. The races have brought all the vagabondage of the country together."

There was a small enclosure in front of the house, and over the dwarf wall a crowd of shabby-looking people were gazing in at the brilliantly lighted room.

"I'll send two of the men round to order them off," she said.

The last that departed looked round at me with the curious eager eyes I had seen before.

Meanwhile the fun was becoming rather fast and furious. They were getting up reels. One of the Highland officers had brought his bagpipes, on which the miscreant was a distinguished amateur performer. MacLeish was one of the noisiest and gayest there. I could hardly recognise the proud, reserved boy I knew. The Pryse-Davieses were bewitched with him and he with them.

"What has come to you, MacLeish?" I asked, when I came upon him, sitting in a dark corner alone, his face buried in his hands. He looked up with a queer, wild smile.

"I'm not mad, Jones, or melancholy. I'm *fey*; that's what it is."

"Come home now, there's a good fellow: it's past two, and you wanted to be early."

"Not a bit of it! I've a valse with Miss Winnie, and half-a-dozen other dances to dispose of."

The other men departed by degrees, but MacLeish stayed on to the last, and I with him.

I might have left him, but some instinct detained me. At last we took leave.

Our shortest way home was through the Lady's Avenue, and I took it without reflection. Half way through the grove MacLeish stopped. He had forgotten some nonsensical commission of one of the girls.

"I'll overtake you," he said. "I *must* go back."

I was too provoked with him to argue, but walked on, then sat down in the gloom on an overturned wheelbarrow and waited.

Some one passed me a few minutes later. He was in the full light of the moon, and I recognised the same shabby figure I had seen twice before—a young, broad-shouldered, slouching rough. He seemed to disappear suddenly behind one of the trees as a footstep approached, and MacLeish's voice was heard singing a valse tune. I caught a glimpse of his Glengarry and plaid as he crossed a streak of moonlight, and the next moment heard a sudden exclamation. Then came a scuffle—blows—and before I could reach them a heavy fall—a groan.

MacLeish was on his knees struggling to rise, held down in the grasp of a fallen man. He shook him off as I got up, and staggered to a tree, against which he leant panting and breathless.

"He tried to garotte me, and when I managed to twist out of his hands, dealt me a heavy blow on the head. I only struck him once, in self-defence. Is he damaged?"

I turned the fallen man over on his back. He lay still. I dragged him to the moonlight.

"MacLeish! He's *dead*."

But MacLeish had dropped on his knees beside him, and was gazing into the dead face with a face as ghastly.

"Fergus! Fergus MacLeish! Have we met? At last!"

He rose, perfectly panic-stricken. It was his cousin, he was assured, and, indeed, the likeness would have convinced me of the fact, without the additional evidence of the marked eyelid.

MacLeish was distraught with terror. It was murder he had done; he should die a felon's death. Nothing I could say would reassure him.

"Leave him here. Who's to know anything about him?" I said at last. "Society is well rid of him.—What on earth are you going to do now?"

He had seized one of the pickaxes left by the labourers, and was digging in fierce haste under the last elm tree.

"His grave was to be here," he said. "He came to show me the spot."

I suppose it was a mad thing to do, but seeing him resolved, I turned to with the spade and helped him. The earth being newly laid, was light and easily moved, and we soon made a trench deep enough for a grave. Then we laid the body gently down, and shovelled the earth in with feverish haste. The broad staring moon showed every pebble on the pathway, every stray leaf on the earth.

We removed all traces of the struggle, replaced the tools, and hurried home in utter silence.

MacLeish held out his hand without speaking as he stopped at his own door. I took it without hesitation. I am glad to remember *that*. He fixed his wild woeful eyes on me for a moment and then hurried away. I was too excited and horror-stricken to *think*, and I lay down, dreading the hours that had to pass before morning. Strange to say, I slept quietly and dreamlessly far into the next day, and when I awoke I could not realise the tragedy in which I had taken part.

"I've dreamed it all," I kept saying to myself; "and a dream is soon forgotten. I'll go and have a swim and then see if the Pryse-Davies girls are out on the Parade. It must be all a nightmare." Still, persuade myself as I might, there were two things I could not do: pass down the Avenue, or face MacLeish.

Where was he, I asked his servant. Gone to the ranges. I would go and meet the party returning. It would be best to get the first meeting over in public. I walked quietly along the pretty country lane, listening for the well-known crack of the rifles. All was silent. Then, at a turn of the road, I came suddenly upon a dozen figures or so walking slowly and silently. Four of them bore a hurdle, on which lay *something* with an officer's cloak thrown over it.

"What is it?" I asked; though I knew beforehand what the very words of the reply were going to be, somehow.

"Poor MacLeish! He was in the butts, and came out to look at the target; they had ceased firing at it. We were shooting at long range, and someone—I don't know who—fired at the wrong target. Shot through the heart—he dropped without a cry—stone dead."

I left Cinquhaven that night, and will never set foot there again as long as I live.

HOW?

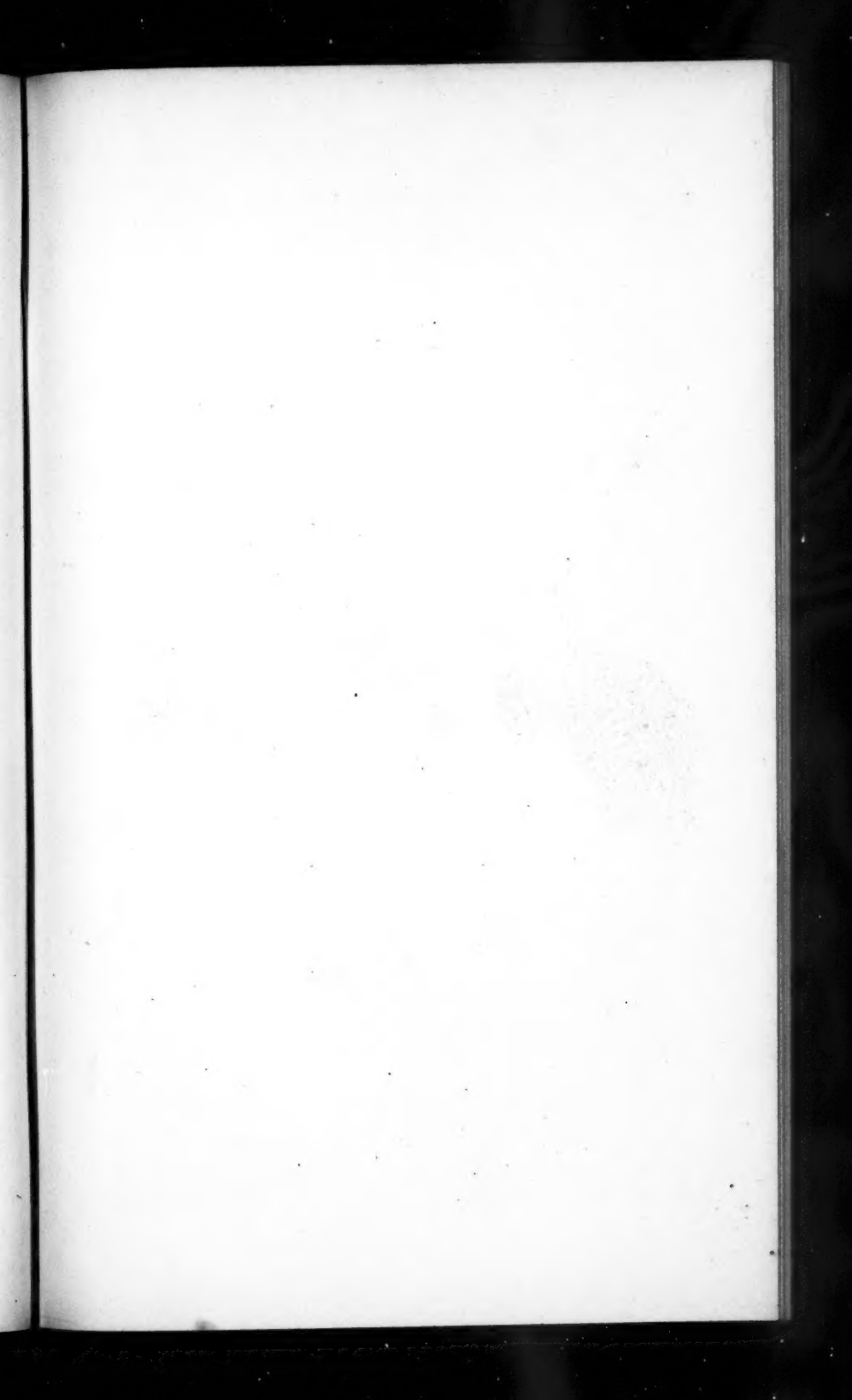
How was it that we met? Ah, well,
 There really is not much to tell,
 Nor can I quite remember now,
 Without some doubt, exactly how
 It happened—in what way;
 For 'tis so many years ago.—
 How many? Well, I hardly know,
 Or hardly like to say.

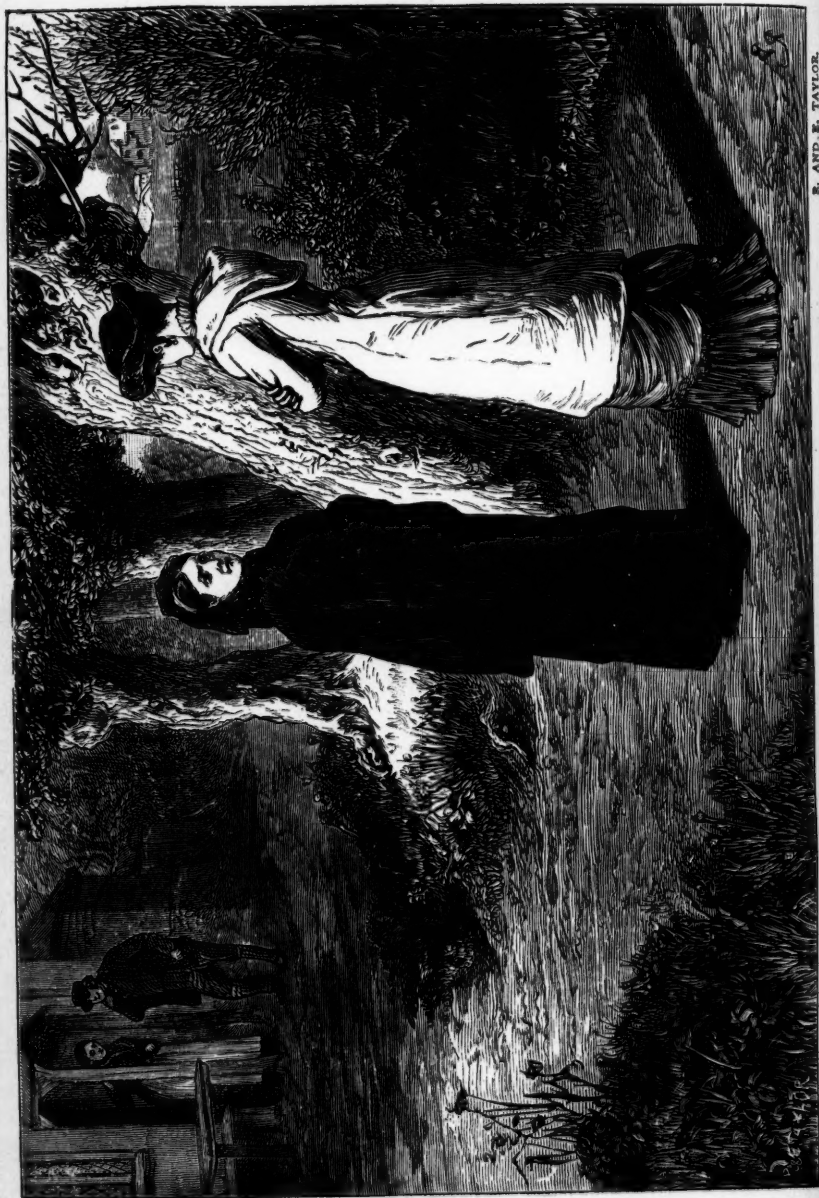
I saw her standing in the glow
 Of apple-blossoms hanging low,
 And she was just as sweet and pure
 As those bright blossoms, I am sure,—
 Ay, sweeter, if you will.
 But *how* it was I hardly know:
 You see, 'twas many years ago—
 And now she's sweeter still!

She says I spoke: I say that she
 Said, "Lovely blossoms!" first to me;
 But, anyway, I did not dare
 To doubt that loveliness was there:
 It shone on lip and brow;
 But 'tis so many years ago,
 That what we said I hardly know,
 So can I tell you *how*?

But this to mind I clearly bring,
 That some time after that sweet spring,
 When apple trees were bearing fruit,
 We went to church to mend our suit,
 And knit two lives in one;
 And though 'tis many years ago,
 And much has happened since, I know
 That mending was well done!

J. T. BURTON WOLLASTON.





MRS. RAVEN DOES HER DUTY.

R. AND. E. TAYLOR.

ROBERT BARNES.